The RED CROSS GIRLS in BELGIUM

MARGARET VANDERCOOK

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The Red Cross Girls in Belgium

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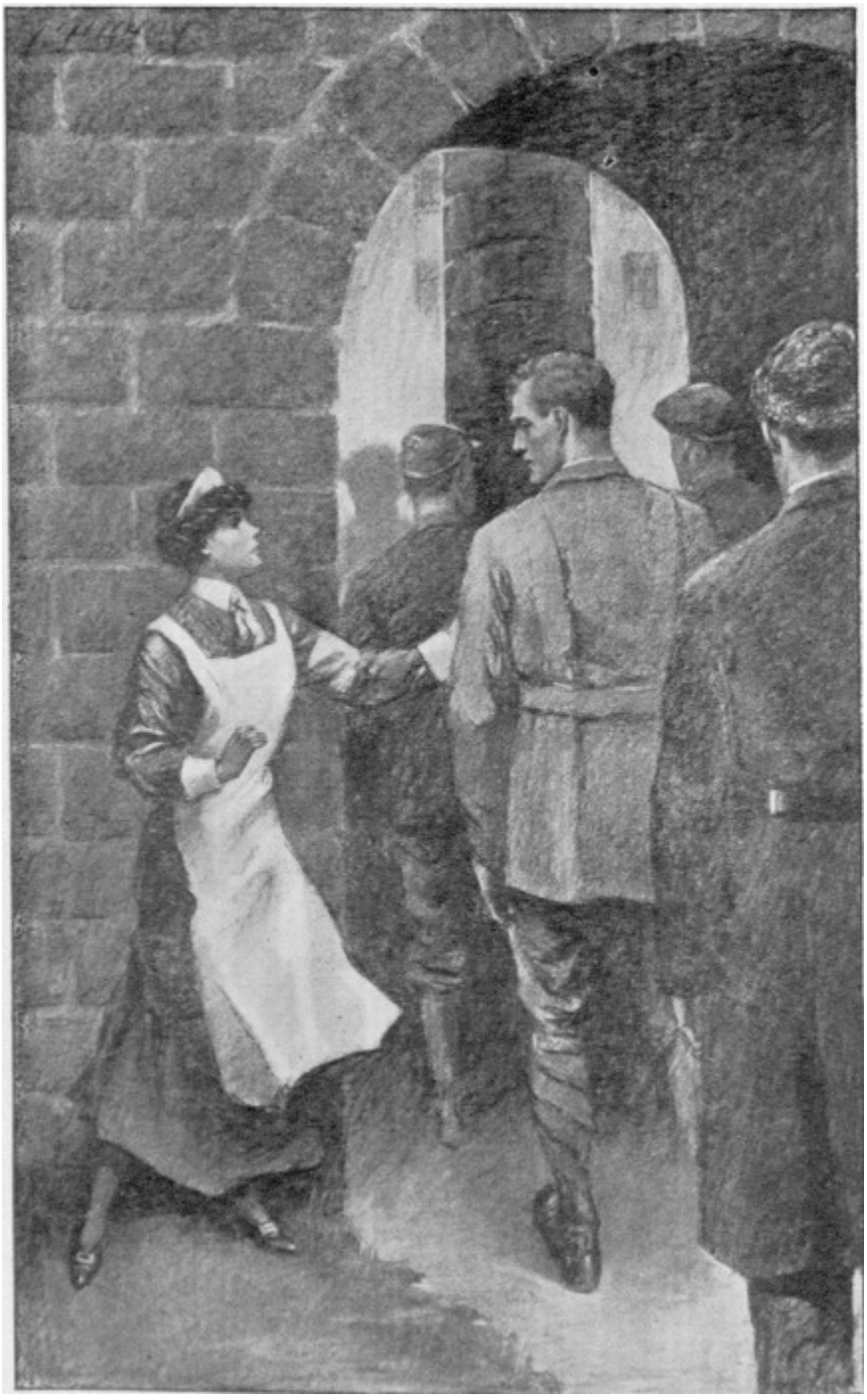
THE RED CROSS GIRLS IN BELGIUM



"LIEUTENANT HUME!" (*See page 117.*)

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By

MARGARET VANDERCOOK

Author of "The Ranch Girls Series," "Stories about Camp Fire Girls Series," etc.

Illustrated

The John C. Winston Company
Philadelphia

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THE RED CROSS GIRLS IN BELGIUM

CHAPTER I
Under Other Skies

After six months of nursing in the British trenches the four American Red Cross girls were inspired to offer their services to the French soldiers. An autumn and a winter they spent together in southern France, keeping house in the little French "Farmhouse with the Blue Front Door."

Here the girls were so interested and so happy that for a little time they almost forgot the tragedies near at hand.

During the first months there had come a lull in the fighting along the borders of Alsace-Lorraine, where the American girls were now stationed. So they had opportunity for enjoying the fragrant woods, "the pool of Melisande" and the romantic atmosphere of the French country.

Their farmhouse was close upon the borders of an old chateau and belonged to its owner, the Countess Castaigne. After a slight misunderstanding a friendship develops between the old Countess and three out of the four American girls. And here in the dignified old Louis XIV drawing room they meet for the second time young Captain Henri Castaigne, whom in Paris they had seen decorated with the Cross of the Legion of Honor.

But between Eugenia Peabody, the New England girl who confesses herself to have been born an "old maid," and the gifted young Frenchman, there seems to be an immediate antagonism. Nevertheless, when the Germans finally surprise the French by an unexpected attack during the French retreat, it is Eugenia who alone rescued and cared for the wounded young officer. The other girls, with the Countess Amélie, join the French army in their new position. Later, when the French retake their old trenches, they return to the former neighborhood.

But for weeks Eugenia has devoted herself to concealing Captain Castaigne from the Germans and to nursing him back to health. Naturally at the end of this time a change in their relations has taken place. Captain Castaigne has

developed a deep affection for Eugenia. But it is difficult to understand her attitude toward him.

In any case, she makes up her mind that it is wiser for the four American Red Cross girls again to change their field of labor. So at the close of the story of "The Red Cross Girls on the French Firing Line," they have decided to leave for Belgium.

"We simply must get into Brussels some time this afternoon," Barbara Meade declared. She was wearing her nurse's uniform and her manner and expression were more than ordinarily professional.

About ten days before the four American Red Cross girls had arrived in Belgium.

They were now seated on piles of loose brick and stone looking out toward a brilliant sunset. Before them the land lay bleak and desolate, while a half-burned house formed their background.

Nevertheless, as it was early summer time, tiny blades of green were peeping up from the dry stubble. On the single apple tree that had been left standing in a once comfortable orchard, a few apples at the top were slowly ripening. Except for this there were few other signs of summer's fulfilment.

In response to Barbara's speech Eugenia Peabody now shook her head with her usual decision.

"Sorry, but I can't go with you," she answered abruptly. "I have something more important to do. Tell them at the headquarters I'll try and come another day."

Then without glancing at any one, Eugenia rose and stalked away. She walked toward a small one-room cottage at some distance behind the ruined house. There she stood with her hands clasped before her. The place was utterly still and deserted. Yet it was difficult to tell whether Eugenia was listening for some unusual sound, or whether she was thinking upon a subject hundreds of miles from the present scene.

The girls were living in a big house a few miles outside of Brussels. This was only a temporary arrangement, as they had not yet received their orders for work from the Belgian Red Cross headquarters.

Barbara at this moment dug her shoe reflectively into the soft earth, in the meanwhile staring after her friend.

"Do you know, girls, Eugenia Peabody has become a mystery to me lately? When we started off on our expedition to Europe together, I thought I understood her character better than either of you. Now I simply don't see through her at all!"

Barbara frowned meditatively.

"Here she has been an heiress all this time, much richer even than Mildred Thornton, when we believed her as poor as a church mouse! But how could any human being have suspected Eugenia of riches when she wore such dreadful clothes?"

So plaintively did Barbara conclude her speech that her two companions laughed. Since arriving in tragic little Belgium they had not been able to laugh frequently. But being only girls they welcomed every opportunity.

Nona nodded agreement with her friend's point of view. The next moment she turned from one to the other of them. Her expression had grown more serious.

"We were hurt with Eugenia for not taking us into her confidence sooner, weren't we?" she remarked, not so much in the manner of asking a question as of making a statement.

If there had not been a rose-colored light on her face from the sunset Nona would seem to have flushed at this instant.

"I was wounded," she went on, "even though Eugenia explained that she had not meant to deceive us. She grew up very poor and when an old bachelor uncle left her a fortune she never learned how to spend her money because of her frugal New England training."

"Well, she is learning to spend it on other people now," Mildred Thornton interrupted. "It seems tremendously kind for Eugenia to have brought the

little French girl, Nicolete, over to Belgium with us. She really shocks Eugenia every five minutes in the day, but I suppose Gene is trying to turn the child into a Puritan. Really, she had no reason in the world for being interested in Nicolete except that she was helpful when Captain Castaigne was ill. Then I presume Eugenia felt she might get into trouble with no one to look after her, as she would spend her time amusing the French soldiers."

"Mildred!" Barbara Meade whispered, "do be more careful. You know we promised to say nothing of Nicolete's French origin. She would never have been allowed to come into Belgium if her nationality had been known. And Eugenia is dreadfully nervous for fear the child may be suspected as a spy. No one is too young to escape suspicion these days!"

Barbara made this speech in hushed tones all the time looking carefully about her.

The countryside was for the time being deserted, but at any moment a group of German soldiers might pass by on the way to their barracks. A well-traveled road ran along in front of the place where the Red Cross girls were seated.

About an hour before they had come out together for a walk before dinner and were now resting on their journey back to their new Belgian headquarters.

At this moment Nona Davis got up and stood facing her other two friends.

"I have something to tell you," she began, "and I expect I had best not put it off any longer. I had it in mind when I spoke of Eugenia's secrecy, for you see we have all grown so intimate that we are almost like sisters. I—I too have a confession to make. I tried to tell you when we were crossing on the steamer together. Then it seemed to me I had no right to think you would be interested, and probably you won't be interested now."

Barbara was leaning her rounded chin on her hand. Mildred's lips were parted and her breath coming a little quicker by reason of her interest.

For she and Barbara both recalled Nona Davis' previous hesitation when talking of herself. They only knew a few facts concerning her history. She had been brought up by her father, an old southern soldier, in the city of

Charleston, South Carolina. She had led a very lonely, secluded life. These were all their facts.

But since Nona was still hesitating Barbara smiled at her, wrinkling up her small nose in the absurd fashion she had when particularly in earnest.

"Go on, Nona, tell us at once. Are you a princess in disguise? I am quite prepared to believe it. To tell you the honest truth, it would not surprise me half so much as Eugenia's turning into an heiress. Alas, that I am what I am, a maid without a mystery!"

However, Nona was not in the humor to be diverted by her friend's nonsense.

"I am sorry my story is not in the least like that. So I am afraid it won't be of interest to you. Perhaps I am foolish to speak of this, since I have never, never talked of it to any one before."

Nona's brown eyes were clear and straightforward, although her chin quivered sensitively.

"I know nothing about my mother," she went on speaking quickly, now that she had made up her mind to the confidence. "Of course, I remember her when I was a very little girl in our old house in Charleston. But after she went away my father would never talk of her nor answer any of my questions. I do know, however, that she was a great deal younger than he, and I think she was French and came from New Orleans. There must have been something strange about my mother or her family; I never could decide and no one would ever tell me. Even after I grew up and asked questions of my father's old friends there was always the same silence. This was one of the reasons why I made up my mind to come away from Charleston," Nona finished quietly.

She had not been tragic or dramatic in the telling of her story, and yet neither of her two girl friends knew exactly what to answer.

But since the silence must somehow be broken, Mildred Thornton murmured, "How very odd; perhaps you are mistaken, Nona!" Then she realized that she had made an absurd speech.

Barbara was even more visibly embarrassed. "Possibly your mother was a princess or something!" she ejaculated vaguely. "I always insisted that you were one of the most aristocratic persons I ever knew, both in your appearance and manner, Nona," her friend continued, desiring to be comforting and yet appreciating that her remarks were also rather ridiculous.

Nona, however, was not to be turned aside in her confession.

"I have only spoken of this because I wanted you girls to know the facts in my life that are important. Of course, I realize this problem of mine cannot mean a great deal to you. But it has puzzled me all my life. You see, I don't even know whether my mother is living or dead. I have supposed that she was dead, and my father always talked as if she were; but I really am not sure of even that."

Nona then extended a hand to each of her friends.

"Please let us never speak of this again," she asked. "Of course, I mean to tell Eugenia, for it was because we were hurt by her lack of confidence in us that I nerved myself for my confession."

Nona then sat down again as if the entire subject were closed forever.

So, although the other girls had dozens of questions at the tips of their tongues, they remained politely silent.

In order to conceal her embarrassment Mildred Thornton glanced around to try to find Eugenia. She discovered that the older girl had at last been disturbed from her reverie. Indeed, she had risen and was walking toward the road. For a noise with which they had grown familiar in the past fifteen months was drawing nearer and nearer. It was the tramping of soldiers' feet.

But this time there was a sound accompanying it which was even more disturbing.

The other girls heard the same sound and almost at the same time jumped up from their seats. They went a few paces forward and then stopped and stared.

A number of German soldiers were driving a group of Belgian people before them like so many sheep. There were two old men and two middle-aged women with several small children.

Running further forward, Barbara slipped her arm inside Eugenia's.

"What does this mean?" she queried, her eyes suddenly blurring with tears.

Yet she realized that the prisoners had probably been disloyal to their conquerors. They may have refused to obey the rules imposed by the German military commander of their district; they may have stolen food, or been insolent to the soldiers.

Although she appreciated their possible offences, Barbara felt deeply sympathetic.

For the past year and more she had been witnessing the suffering of the wounded soldiers in the British and French lines. She had thought that nothing else could ever touch her so deeply. Yet in the last ten days she had been stirred in a different way. The soldiers were fighting for the cause nearest their hearts and enjoyed the enthusiasm and the glory of the soldier's life. But in Belgium so many of the people appeared both helpless and hopeless; these were the old men, the women and the children.

Barbara was thinking of this now as she watched the pitiful little company before her. She had not even noticed that Eugenia had made her no answer. Now she was startled because the older girl had broken loose from her and was stalking out into the road.

Barbara was next amazed to see Eugenia deliberately plant herself in front of the German officer in command.

She spoke excellent German, knowing more of the language than any one of the four Red Cross girls. Now Barbara could only guess what Eugenia was saying. But whatever it was, the German sergeant had stopped and was apparently listening respectfully. There must have been something impressive in her voice and manner.

Three minutes afterwards the other three girls were the more surprised to observe Eugenia returning toward them. Because in her arms she was

carrying a tiny, black-eyed baby, while a small boy and a small girl clung to either side of her skirt. The boy was about nine or ten years old and was lame.

"Why, what does this mean, Eugenia?" Nona demanded, dropping on her knees to take the boy's small, cold hand in her own warm one. But the boy seemed to prefer Eugenia, for he crept closer to her.

"Oh, it was nothing of any importance," Eugenia began explaining quietly. "The sergeant told me he had orders to take the men and women into Brussels. They are suspected of something or other and are to be put into prison. He said he had brought the children along because there was nothing else to do with them, so I offered to look after them."

"But, but," Mildred Thornton faltered. "I know it is a painful situation, Eugenia dear, but what *can* you do with three babies? Our house is already so full——"

Eugenia nodded. "Yes, I understand, but I have already decided what to do. I'll stay here in the little one-room house with the children tonight. I looked it over the other day. There isn't any furniture, but we must manage for the night. You girls bring me over whatever covers you can spare and ask Nicolete to bring all the food she can get hold of."

"But you don't mean to stay here alone with these children in this perfectly forsaken place," Barbara expostulated, dimly conscious that Eugenia was becoming more of a puzzle than ever. Do old maids now and then represent the real mother spirit? "I'll stay with you, Eugenia," she added faintly, not altogether enjoying the prospect.

But the older girl shook her head. "You have your own work to do, Bab. Only one of us can be spared. What possible danger could come to these little kiddies and me?"

Looking backward a few moments later, the three girls discovered that Eugenia and the children had already disappeared inside the little house.

CHAPTER II
A Modern Knight Errant

"I can't understand why you and Nona are behaving so strangely, Mildred. You have been whispering together all day. I am sure you are acting more like foolish school-girls than grown women," Barbara commented in an annoyed tone.

She was walking alongside her two taller friends with her head held as high as possible to make up for her lack of dignity in stature. Two spots of angry color decorated her cheeks.

For neither Mildred nor Nona had condescended to pay any attention to her remark. Moreover, their whispering continued.

The three girls were walking abreast along one of the suburban roads that lead into the city of Brussels. It was a long walk, yet horses and motor cars were only used by the powerful in these days, except in cases of especial urgency. So as the three Red Cross girls were merely going into town to report at the Red Cross headquarters, there was no real reason why they should ride instead of walk.

They had not objected to the walk; indeed, had been glad of the opportunity. But as Barbara had found herself entirely left out of the conversation along the way, naturally she was beginning to find the road a tiresome one.

Brussels has always been thought to be a miniature Paris. Indeed, the Belgian capital has been modeled on the larger city. But beside its art, nature has given it the same gayety of spirit and a portion of the same natural beauty. So it does not seem unreasonable that the two cities shed their tears together during the great war. Yet the American girls had witnessed no such gloom in Paris as they found in Brussels.

In Paris one was at least able to talk freely against the enemy, to gesticulate with the abandon characteristic of the Latin peoples. Here in the Belgian city one must be dumb, as well as hungry and sick at heart. To speak one's

mind was to offend against His Majesty, the Kaiser, since everywhere in Belgium the Germans were now in command.

Therefore, as the girls reached the city they too became affected by the subdued atmosphere. Of course, the people engaged in certain necessary occupations were about, but trading was very slight. In some of the cafés there were a few German soldiers. But not many of them were quartered in Brussels, only a sufficient number to preserve peace and to enforce a surface loyalty to their conquerors.

Barbara and Nona were in deep sympathy with the Belgians. Barbara because she was always enlisted on the side of the weak against the strong. Nona, possibly because as a South Carolina girl, she belonged to a country that had once been overrun by greater numbers. But Mildred Thornton and Eugenia insisted that they intended to preserve neutral attitudes. They were Red Cross nurses, not soldiers, and there is always another side to every story.

As Nona's attention was so engaged by Mildred, even after the three girls arrived in Brussels, Barbara had little to do except make observations. This was not their first trip to the Red Cross headquarters, but they did not yet know the city sufficiently well not to enter it as strangers.

Only in one place could Barbara discover a crowd and that was wherever a church stood. Women and children and an occasional elderly man were always entering and leaving the Catholic churches.

Suddenly Barbara thought of Eugenia. Why had she not come with them this afternoon? They had been told to report to the Red Cross headquarters in order to be assigned to their work. Usually it was Eugenia who rigidly insisted upon obedience to orders. What could she have in mind this afternoon of greater importance?

Barbara had paid a visit to Eugenia and the three children earlier in the day. She had found them contentedly playing at housekeeping in the one-room shack, which must once have been a small storehouse. By one of the many miracles of war this little place had escaped destruction when the larger house was burned.

Eugenia, who was by nature a commander-in-chief, had set the children various tasks. Bibo, the lame boy, was gathering chips from the charred, half-burned apple trees as cheerfully as a small grasshopper transformed into a thrifty ant. The girl, Louise, was assisting Nicolete to spread their scanty covering upon a freshly washed floor, sedate as a model chambermaid. Barbara had watched them in some amusement before attempting to join Eugenia.

It seemed difficult to remember the scarlet poppy of a girl whom she had first seen dancing for the French soldiers, in the present Nicolete. For one thing, Eugenia had demanded that the French girl wear sober and conventional clothes. So gone was her scarlet skirt and cap! Nicolete now wore an ordinary shirtwaist and skirt and a blue gingham apron. The clothes had once belonged to Mildred Thornton and Nona had kindly altered them to fit. Because the three girls had absolutely refused to allow Eugenia to put her little French protégé into any of her ancient New England toilets. There were limits to the things an artistic nature could endure, Barbara had protested.

But why, after all, had Nicolete decided to come away with them from her own beloved land? It was equally as mysterious to the three other girls as Eugenia's adoption of the child.

Neither of them had discussed their reasons. As Captain Castaigne soon after his recovery had been ordered north with his regiment, he was not able to offer an explanation. The three American Red Cross girls were simply told that Nicolete had no people of her own and did not wish to go back to the family who had formerly cared for her.

But after Barbara's survey of the cottage she had returned to the yard for a talk with Eugenia.

She had found her with the little Belgian baby in her arms walking about the ruined house.

Even here in the streets of Brussels, with so many other objects to absorb her attention, Barbara again found herself wondering at the change in Eugenia. She did not seem to care to be in their society as she had in the earlier part of their acquaintance. Nevertheless, she was no longer so stern

and dictatorial. Today she had asked Barbara's advice quite humbly about a number of things. Yet she had refused point-blank to tell what she intended doing on this same afternoon.

But Barbara's reflections were suddenly ended by their arrival in front of a handsome house in Brussels. It was a private mansion that had been given over to the relief work by General von Bissing, the German military governor of Belgium.

They found the place crowded. In the hall there was a long line of Belgians waiting assistance. Yet the girls felt almost at home, there were so many of their own country people about.

However, they were invited to wait in a small reception room until the Superintendent could find time for them.

The buildings in Brussels have so far remained uninjured by the war. For although fighting had taken place all around the city, the surrender came before its destruction.

The girls were ushered into what had once been an attractive sitting room. At one side there was a small sofa and here Nona and Mildred straightway seated themselves without regarding their friend.

So once more Barbara felt hurt and left out of things. By chance there was no chair near the sofa, but by this time she was far too much wounded to try to force herself into the conversation.

However, Barbara at least felt privileged to use her eyes. For some mysterious reason both Mildred and Nona were looking unusually cheerful. This was certainly odd in view of the fact that everything they had seen since coming into Belgium was more than depressing. Yet Barbara decided that Nona was uncommonly gay and excited. Her eyes were a darker brown than usual and her cheeks had more color. There could be little doubt that she was exceptionally pretty most of the time and even prettier than usual today. Moreover, Mildred had lost her serious expression. Her fine white teeth flashed every moment into a smile. Animation was what Mildred most needed and she had her full share today.

"Shall we tell Barbara now?" Distinctly Barbara overheard Mildred Thornton whisper these few words. Yet in return Nona shook her head so decisively that Mildred evidently changed her mind.

When the door to their sitting room opened Barbara had again fallen into a reverie. She heard some one enter the room, but supposing the man a messenger did not glance up.

Barbara's exclamation of surprise was due to the surprising behavior of her two companions.

For Mildred and Nona at once jumped to their feet, and actually Mildred ran forward a few steps with her arms outstretched.

In amazement Barbara at this moment turned her gaze upon the newcomer. Immediately her face flushed and the tears started to her eyes, yet she would rather have perished than let either effect be discovered.

However, she had only seen a young American fellow of about twenty-two or three years of age, dressed in a dark-blue serge suit. He looked extremely well and handsome, except for the fact that his left arm was apparently paralyzed.

By this time Mildred had thrown her arms about his neck and they were kissing each other with devoted affection.

"I can't say how happy I am to see you, Dick. It is the most beautiful thing that ever happened to have you here in Belgium with us! I have scarcely been able to wait until today, and then I was so afraid you would not arrive in time."

All this from the usually quiet Mildred!

However, Dick Thornton had finally ceased greeting his sister and turned to Nona Davis. Nona seemed as glad to see him as Mildred. She held his hand for some time and kept insisting upon her pleasure in meeting him again.

Nevertheless, after Nona's greeting had occupied as long a time as possible, Barbara Meade made not the slightest effort to step forward and welcome her former friend.

Certainly his arrival explained Mildred's and Nona's mysterious behavior. Yet what reason could there have been for not telling her they expected Richard Thornton's appearance in Brussels on this particular afternoon? She had not offended against any one of the three of them, that she should have been so ignored!

It was a very stiff Barbara whom Dick finally walked across the room to greet: Eugenia at her best could never have appeared more uncomprising. With his hand extended Dick involuntarily paused, while a curious expression showed on his face.

"Aren't you pleased to see me, Barbara—Miss Meade?" he corrected himself. "I have not recovered, but I've found out that I can be of some little use with the relief work here in Brussels with one arm. But besides wishing to be useful, I have four attractions to bring me to Belgium."

Dick spoke in his old light-hearted fashion, although Barbara could see that a part of it was pretense.

"Of course, I am glad to see you," she returned slowly. "But since I have been left out of the secret of your coming, you must understand that I am more surprised than anything else at present."

"Oh, certainly," Dick answered, letting his arm drop to his side. For Barbara had apparently not seen his extended hand.

"Dick was uncertain whether he could be of service and so asked us not to speak of his coming until he was positive," Mildred apologized. "I wanted to tell you, Barbara, but Nona felt it best not to. She had the last letter with instructions from Dick."

Barbara glanced toward Nona and then at Dick. Assuredly there was an understanding between them. Well, she must learn not to mind the feeling of being ignored since it would probably continue for some time to come.

CHAPTER III
A Secret Mission

On the same afternoon of Dick Thornton's coming into Belgium Eugenia started out alone on her unexplained errand. She left her recently acquired family in charge of the little French girl, Nicolete.

Nicolete seemed happier with the children than she had been since her removal from France. Indeed, the three American girls had sometimes wondered over her unfriendliness toward them and her unusual quiet. At their first meeting she had appeared such a gay, gypsy-like person.

But Eugenia did not walk to her engagement. By making a tremendous effort she had managed to hire an old horse and buggy. Then, after she felt sure the other three Red Cross girls had departed on the road toward Brussels, she set out. Inside the wagon she carefully hid out of sight her bag of Red Cross supplies, although she did not wear her nurse's uniform.

Earlier in the day Barbara had brought down her suitcase, so that she could appear in an ordinary street dress.

Driving along the road Eugenia hoped to suggest that she was only off on an ordinary errand which could not interest any one who chanced to observe her.

She was looking rather plain and tired and was unusually nervous, but this it would have been difficult to guess from her quiet manner.

The country through which she passed was one of queer contrasts. There were many houses that had been destroyed by fire, but others that had not even been touched. In these places people were evidently making an effort to lead an ordinary, everyday existence. But they were all listless and discouraged. Eugenia thought that the children must have forgotten how to play in this last year, when their land had suffered such sorrow.

She wished that she might gather them all together in one great circle that should extend all over Belgium and set them to laughing and playing once more.

However, Eugenia soon left the populated part of the neighborhood. She and her old horse wound their way along a stream and then came to a gate. There was no house in sight from the gate, but just as if she had been there before, Eugenia got down and opened it. Then she tied her horse behind a clump of trees inside the woods and with her bag of nursing supplies in her hand crept along on foot up a narrow path. Every once and a while she would stop and glance cautiously about her. But no one was in sight to be interested in her proceedings. Moreover, where could she be going? She seemed to have some end in view, and yet there was no place or person in the vicinity. Any one familiar with the neighborhood could have explained that Eugenia must be bent upon an utterly ridiculous errand. There was an old house about half a mile farther along, but it had been deserted long before the Germans had ever set foot on conquered Belgium.

A tragedy had occurred in the house ten or fifteen years before, and ever afterwards the place had been supposed to be haunted.

No one believed such nonsense, of course, since intelligent persons do not believe in ghosts. But the house was too far from the village, and was in too bad a state of repair to be a desirable residence. Indeed, there were dozens of reasons why, after its owners moved, no one else cared to rent it.

Moreover, the house had also escaped the interest of the German invaders of the land. So why in the world should it be of so great interest to Eugenia that she was making this lonely pilgrimage, without taking any one of the three Red Cross girls into her confidence?

The house was of brick and a large one. Every outside shutter was closed in front and the vines had so grown over them that they were half covered. There was a porch also in front, but the boards of the steps had long since rotted away.

At first only a large toad appeared to greet Eugenia. He eyed her distrustfully for a second, his round eyes bulging and his body rigid with

suspicion. Then he hopped behind his stone fortress, which chanced to be a large stone at the end of the path before the house.

However, Eugenia did not see him. Neither did she attempt to go up the rickety steps. How absurd it would have been anyhow to have battered at the door of a mansion that had been uninhabited for years!

Instead she marched deliberately around the house and knocked at a door at the side.

A few seconds after, this door was opened by a woman of middle age.

She looked very worn and unhappy, but her face brightened at the sight of her guest.

"I was so afraid you wouldn't, couldn't get here," she said. "I suppose you know you are taking a risk."

Eugenia nodded in her usual matter of fact fashion.

"I promised your friend I would do my best," she returned. "Will you please take me up to the room. You must make up your mind to get more air into this house. I don't think you need fear you will be suspected, if you managed to arrive here without being detected."

"I *am* afraid," the older woman answered. She was leading the way up a pair of back stairs that were in almost total darkness.

"You see, I know I have been accused of sending information to my husband who is supposed to be at the front with the Belgian army. I was about to be arrested and tried by a military court. I should have been sent to prison and I could not be separated from my family at such a time!"

The last few words were whispered. Because at this moment the woman's hand had touched a door knob which she was gently turning. The next she and Eugenia were entering a large room at the back of the apparently deserted house.

A window had been opened and an attempt made to clean this room. On the bed, with a single scanty cover over them, two persons were lying. One of them was a young boy and the other a man.

Both of them were extremely ill. Eugenia realized this at a glance, but paid little attention to the man at first. For she suddenly had a complete understanding of Madame Carton's last words.

The boy was such an exquisite little fellow of about ten years old. He had straight golden hair and gray eyes with darker lashes. There was the same high-bred, delicate look that one remembers in the picture of "The Two Little Princes in the Tower."

Through a peculiar source Eugenia had already learned a portion of Madame Carton's story. She was a Belgian woman whose home was one of the handsomest in the city of Brussels. But after the city had been forced to surrender to the Germans, Madame Carton had refused to give up her home unless the authorities expelled her by force. This for some reason they had appeared unwilling to do. However, a short time after the German occupancy of Brussels, reports accusing Madame Carton of treason and rebellion began to be circulated. It was said that she was sending secret information to her husband, who was a colonel in the Belgian army and on the personal staff of King Albert. Finally Madame Carton learned that her arrest was only a matter of a few hours. Then it was that she had managed to escape to this deserted house with her family. So far it looked as if her whereabouts had remained undiscovered.

One hour after Eugenia's arrival she and Madame Carton were once more at the foot of the stairs. They had opened the side door to let in a tiny streak of light and air.

"But, Madame Carton, I don't think it is possible," Eugenia announced with her usual directness. "I am willing to do whatever I can to help nurse your little boy and the other patient, but I can come to you very seldom without being discovered. You see, I may be ordered to nurse in any part of Belgium and I must do what I am told. Is there any one here to assist you?"

Madame Carton nodded. She had once been a very beautiful woman with the gray eyes and fair hair of her son. But the last year of witnessing the desolation of her people and her country had whitened her hair and made many lines in her face.

"Yes, I have an old family servant with me. I should never have been able to make the journey without her help. She and my little girl, who is six years old, are in hiding in another room in the attic of this house. Years ago when I was a child I used to come here to play with friends who then owned this place. I suppose that is why I thought of our hiding here when the crisis came," Madame Carton explained quietly. "Now if I return to Brussels perhaps Paul may be cared for. But you know what else would happen. It would be inevitable! Even if I were not shot I must go to prison. Can't you help me? Can't you think of some way to save us *all*?"

The older woman took hold of Eugenia's hands and clung to them despairingly.

"I know I am asking what looks like an impossible thing of you, and you a complete stranger! Yet you look so strong and fine," Madame Carton's voice broke, but Eugenia's touch was reassuring.

"If only a doctor could come to us, perhaps with your advice I might manage the nursing myself," she continued.

Eugenia shook her head.

"When Dr. Le Page asked me to see you and gave me the directions, he said it was only because he dared not visit you himself," Eugenia explained kindly, but with her usual avoidance of anything but the truth. "He insists that, although he is an American, he is suspected of feeling too much sympathy for the Belgians. After warning you to escape he was questioned and believes he is still being watched. That is why he confided you to me, asking me to do the little I can to aid you. So if he should attempt to reach you out here, it would mean his arrest as well as yours. I am sorry," the girl ended.

Her words were simple enough in the face of so great a calamity. Yet there was no mistaking their sympathy.

Madame Carton appeared to surrender her judgment and her problem to Eugenia for solution.

"Tell me, Miss Peabody, what do you think I should do?" she asked. "It is not worth while for me to say that I care little what becomes of me. Shall I

return to Brussels and give us all up to the authorities?"

Eugenia did not answer immediately. When she spoke again she offered no explanation of her own meaning.

"Please wait a while, Madame Carton, if possible, until I can see you again?" she asked. "In case you are not discovered before then I may have a plan to suggest that will help you. But I cannot be sure. Good-by and a good courage."

Then Eugenia marched deliberately back to the place where her old horse was in waiting. She then drove unmolested to the tiny house that was sheltering Nicolete and the three stray children.

But on her way she was repeating to herself a phrase she had learned years before as a girl at the High School:

"Quorum omnium fortissimi sunt Belgae," said Cæsar nearly twenty centuries ago. "The bravest of all these are the Belgians."

Eugenia thought the same thing today and for the same reason Cæsar did. "Because they are nearest to the Germans, who dwell across the Rhine, with whom they do continually wage war."

CHAPTER IV
Plans for the Future

The moon shone down upon Belgium as serenely as upon any unconquered land.

Two girls were walking slowly arm in arm along a stretch of country road. There was no one else in sight at the time, yet they seemed entirely unafraid. A quarter of a mile beyond them, however, a dim light burned in the window of a small frame house. Near it was a tumbled mass of brick and stone.

"We received our orders for work this afternoon, Eugenia dear," Barbara remarked. "They were sorry you were not with us. But you are to come in to headquarters as soon as possible, when arrangements will be made for you."

Unconsciously Barbara sighed and although it was too dark in the moonlight to distinguish the expression on her face, her companion paused for a moment.

"Are you disappointed in what they wish you to do, Barbara, child?" Eugenia inquired more gently than she usually spoke. "You sound rather forlorn and 'wee' as the Scotch sometimes say. Of course, I know you are tired from the long trip into Brussels and coming here to spend the night with me. It is lovely to have you for this quiet walk, but I'm afraid you'll find a bed on the floor a pretty hard resting place even for war times."

"Oh, I shan't mind. Besides, I brought over some more bed-clothes," the younger girl answered, although her attention was not really fixed upon her reply.

Eugenia had guessed correctly in thinking Barbara was tired. Her face was very small and white, so that her eyes appeared almost unnaturally large and blue. Her only color was in her lips, which drooped like a weary child's.

"Oh, yes, the work is all right. One can't expect an easy time of it these days. Besides, I hope some day to prove to you, Eugenia, that I did not come to Europe to nurse in the Red Cross just for the sake of an adventure. Of course, I shall never dare hope to do anything to compare with what you have done, or to be anything like you, but——"

Barbara's speech was interrupted by her friend's hand being laid firmly across her lips.

"I prefer your not saying things like that," she answered in a tone that the other girl felt obliged to respect. It was not that Eugenia was unduly modest. Only that she had never appeared to desire to talk about her final experience in France. Indeed, the other three girls had been provoked before this by her reticence. It was all very well for Eugenia not to discuss before strangers her rescue and care of Captain Castaigne under such extraordinary difficulties. But it was tiresome of her never to be willing to relate the details of her experience to her most intimate companions. Personally, Barbara Meade intended to hear the whole thing some day from beginning to end. Then she would be able to tell the story to the Countess Amelie, who had become her own and Nona's devoted friend. For Captain Castaigne had given only a brief account of the circumstances to his mother. Actually he had been as reticent in the matter as Eugenia. However, Barbara was not in the mood tonight to demand other people's confessions.

"If you are tired, suppose we sit down for a while," Eugenia suggested. The two girls found a tree near by that had been uprooted by an underground explosion and lay face down upon the earth with its arms outspread, like a defeated giant.

Unconsciously they both sighed with relief and then smiled half humorously at each other.

"We are all to work at the same hospital in Brussels," Barbara went on. "At least, Mildred and Nona and I have been chosen for the same place. I don't know about you. Thank goodness, it is an American hospital and supported by our money!"

"Don't be prejudiced," Eugenia remonstrated.

But Barbara shook her head impatiently. "How can one help being? You are only pretending to yourself that you are neutral. If the Germans had been conquered, perhaps I should feel equally sorry for them. But to me Belgium is like a gallant boy who went out with his head up and his lips smiling to do battle with a giant. The courage of it is like a song!"

In silence Eugenia agreed.

Then Barbara leaned her curly brown head on her companion's arm.

"I have a piece of news for you, Gene," she added. "Really, I came to you tonight to be the first to tell you. Who do you think arrived in Brussels today to help with the American Relief work?" Barbara did not wait for an answer to her question. "Dick Thornton!" she finished with a sudden indrawing of her breath.

The older girl did not glance toward her companion. Her attention seemed to be fixed upon a particularly effective June moon which was just emerging from a cloud-like veil.

"That is tremendously good news, isn't it? And it is great of Dick to insist on being useful in spite of his misfortune! But perhaps I am not so surprised as you think I ought to be, Barbara. Nona half confessed the possibility of his turning up to me several days ago. She told me I was not to speak of this, however, to you, because Dick might not be able to come and he did not wish—" Eugenia hesitated a second—"he did not wish *Mildred* to be disappointed. Now I am particularly glad you are all to be in Brussels. Perhaps you may have a chance to see Dick *nearly* as often as you like."

"Yes, it will be awfully nice for Mildred and Nona and I am delighted for them," Barbara interrupted, moving several feet away from her friend. "But I do hope you will be with us, Eugenia, to associate with me! I hate to be in the way. And I am afraid I will be, under the circumstances."

The younger girl had lowered her voice to the purest confidential tone. Then, although they were quite alone, she looked carefully around before going on.

"Perhaps I haven't any right to say so, but I am almost sure there is a bond between Nona Davis and Dick. I didn't dream of this when we were in Paris

together. But I know they have been writing each other constantly ever since. Besides, if you had seen their meeting today!"

She ceased talking, for Eugenia was shaking her head in doubt.

"But isn't Nona one of the prettiest girls you ever saw and the most charming?" Barbara demanded argumentatively the next instant. She seemed almost angry at the older girl's silent disagreement.

This time Eugenia inclined her head.

"I have no idea of disputing Nona's beauty or charm, or Dick Thornton's either. He is a splendid American fellow. And if one of you Red Cross girls must fall in love, certainly I should prefer you to fall in love with Dick. However, at present I simply don't believe there is an affair between Dick and Nona."

"But you'll see in time," Barbara persisted.

"Yes, I'll see in time," Eugenia concluded.

Then Barbara crept closer again.

"The moonlight, or something, makes me feel dismal," she confided. "I don't know why, but the moon gives me the blues far more than it ever makes me romantic. Sometimes I wonder if we will ever get back home safely, all of us, without any illness or sorrow or anything," Barbara ended vaguely.

Eugenia could be a remarkably comforting person when she liked.

She made no reply at the moment, only drew the younger girl toward her.

"Now I have something to tell *you*, Barbara. It is good of you to wish me to be in Brussels with you, but I'm really not much good as a companion. You girls are ever so much happier without me, I feel sure, or I wouldn't desert you."

"Desert us?" Barbara stiffened at once, forgetting the other subject of their conversation.

"You don't mean, Eugenia Peabody, that you have decided to give up the Red Cross work and go back home? You, of all of us! I simply won't believe it. Why, I thought you were the most devoted, the most——"

Eugenia laughed half-heartedly. "I didn't say I was going home, Barbara," she protested. "But you are right in thinking I mean to give up my Red Cross work, at least if I am allowed to resign. I don't know why, but recently I don't seem to feel the same fondness for nursing. I kind of dread a great many things about it."

Barbara laid her hand caressingly upon Eugenia's knee.

Really Eugenia was growing so surprisingly human these days that one could scarcely recall the old Eugenia.

"Oh, that is just because you are tired. I know you have always denied this, but you have never been exactly the same since your siege with Captain Castaigne. The responsibility and the work were too much for you. I don't think he was ever half grateful enough! The idea of his joining his regiment without coming to say good-by to you—just writing a letter! Promise me you will go quietly away somewhere and rest for a few weeks, Eugenia. Then I know you'll feel like getting back into harness again. Really, I need you to be with us. I haven't any backbone unless you are around to make me afraid of you."

Eugenia shook her head. "Perhaps I shall not be very far away and we may be able to see each other now and then. I have been thinking of a scheme for several days, almost ever since we came into Belgium. You remember I told you I had a good deal of money, but did not always know just how to spend it. Well, I have found a way here. I am going to get a big house and I am going to fill it full to overflowing with the Belgian babies and all the children who need an old maid mother to look after them. And I think I found the very house I need today. It is an old place that is supposed to be haunted and is far away from everything else. But it is big and has an old veranda. Perhaps I'll still be doing Red Cross work if I take care of well babies as well as sick ones. Do you think I'll make a great failure as a mother, Bab?" she ended.

Without replying Barbara's answer was yet sufficiently reassuring.

At the same time she was wondering if these past few months had changed Eugenia as much as she appeared to be changed. But perchance she had always been mistaken in her view of her.

Then both girls started suddenly to their feet. For the little French girl, Nicolete, had come upon them unawares. She gave Barbara a glance revealing but little affection. Then beckoning Eugenia mysteriously aside she soon ran off again like a sprite in the moonlight.

CHAPTER V
St. Gudula

Several weeks later Barbara Meade walked down the steps of a house in Brussels out into one of the streets near the Palais de la Nation. The house had once been a private residence, but since the coming of war into the heart of Belgium had been turned into a relief hospital by the American Red Cross Society.

Barbara walked slowly, looking at all the objects of interest along the way. She wore a dark-blue taffeta suit and white blouse and a small blue hat with a single white wing in it.

Evidently she was not in a hurry. Indeed, she behaved more like an ordinary tourist than an overworked nurse. Yet a glance into Barbara's face would have suggested that she was dreadfully fagged and anxious to get away from the beaten track for a few hours. It chanced to be her one afternoon of leisure in the week, so for the time she had discarded her nurse's uniform. She was also trying to forget the trouble surrounding her and to appreciate the beauty and charm of Brussels.

Yet Barbara found it difficult to get into a mood of real enjoyment. These past few weeks represented the hardest work she had yet done, for the funds for the Belgian Relief work were getting painfully low. Therefore, as there were still so many demands, the workers could only try to do double duty.

Finally Barbara entered the church of St. Gudula, which happened to be near at hand. It was a beautiful Gothic building, dedicated to the patron saint of Brussels. Once inside, the girl strolled quietly about, feeling herself already rested and calmed from the simple beauty of the interior. The tall rounded pillars and sixteenth century stained glass represented a new world of color and beauty. Although she was not a Catholic, Barbara could not refrain from saying a short prayer in the "Chapel of Notre-Dame-de-Deliverance" for the safety of the Belgian people and their gallant king and queen. Barbara was too loyal an American to believe that kings and queens

were any longer useful as the heads of governments. Nevertheless, as a noble man and woman, King Albert and Queen Elizabeth of Belgium, commanded her admiration and sympathy. Since the outbreak of the war neither of them seem to have given thought to their royalty, remembering only their common humanity with the people of their land.

Already comforted by the few minutes of quiet, finally Barbara slipped out of one of the side doors that chanced to be open. Afterwards she stood looking about her in order to find out just where she was.

The side street was almost entirely free from passers by. Therefore, as Barbara desired to inquire her way to the nearest tram line, she waited for a moment. At some distance down the street she could see the figure of a man walking in her direction.

She did not look very closely or she might have discovered something familiar in the quick stride and the graceful carriage of the head and shoulders. The men of Brussels are rather more French than Flemish in their appearance, yet this man did not resemble a foreigner.

Indeed, he walked so much more rapidly than Barbara expected that she was extremely startled when a voice said close beside her:

"Why, Barbara, this is good luck. To think I have not seen you since the first afternoon of my arrival! I'm sorry you have been so tremendously busy every time I have had a chance to run into the hospital for a few moments. But Mildred and Nona have given me news of you."

Dick Thornton had taken Barbara's hand and was looking searchingly into her face. But after her first recognition of him she had dropped her lids, so it was not possible to see her eyes.

"I have just been up to your hospital now, but could not get hold of either Mildred or Nona. I am sorry. Nona had promised me, if she could be spared, to spend the afternoon seeing sights. I have investigated thirty destitute Belgian families since eight o'clock this morning and reported their cases, so I feel rather in the need of being cheered."

Barbara's chin quivered a little, although it was not perceptible to her companion.

"I am dreadfully sorry too," she answered the next instant. "Certainly you are deserving of Nona's society for a reward. And if I had only known your plan you might have carried it out. It is my afternoon of freedom, but I would very cheerfully have changed my time with Nona."

"You are awfully kind, I am sure," Dick returned. But he scarcely showed the gratitude at Barbara's suggestion that she expected.

He glanced up at the beautiful Gothic tower of the church near them, remarking irritably, "I expect you are quite as much in need of a rest as any one else. Really, Barbara, it is all very well to do the best one can to help these unfortunate people, but there is no especial point in killing yourself. You look wretchedly. You are not trying to play at being the patron saint of Brussels, are you? Is that why you haunt the church of Saint Gudula?"

Barbara smiled. "I am the farthest person from a saint in this world," she replied, wrinkling up her small nose with a faint return to her old self. "Nona and Mildred and I have decided recently that we haven't but one saint among us. And she is the last person I should ever have awarded the crown at our first meeting. Moreover, I wouldn't dare present it to her now, if she could see or hear me in the act. She would probably destroy me utterly, because my saint is very human and sometimes has a dreadful temper, besides a desire to boss everybody else. I wonder if real saints ever had such traits of character? Of course, you know I mean Eugenia! I am on my way now to her Hotel des Enfants, if I can ever find the right street car. She already is taking care of twelve children, and I have never seen her nor her house since we separated. Gene has promised to send some one to meet me at the end of the car line. Her house is a deserted old place where a ghost is supposed to hold forth. But I am assured the ghost has not turned up recently. It is nice to have met you. Good-by." And Barbara was compelled to stop talking for lack of breath after her long speech, as she held out her hand. Dick ignored the outstretched hand. His face had assumed a charming, boyish expression of pleading. Barbara was reminded of the first days of their meeting in New York City.

"I say, Barbara, why can't I go along with you?" he demanded. "Of course, I realize that for some reason or other you are down upon me. I am not such a chump as not to understand you could have seen me for a few minutes in

these last few weeks if you had tried. But Eugenia is friendly enough. I haven't seen her, but I had a stunning note from her. Besides, as I sent her five of her twelve Belgian babies, I think I've the right to find out if she is being good to them. I am a kind of a godfather to the bunch. Let's stop by a shop and get some stuffed dolls and whistles and sugar plums. Some of the Belgian children I have discovered seemed to be forgetting how to play."

Barbara had not answered. Indeed, Dick had not intended to give her a chance. Nevertheless, her expression had changed to a measure of its former brightness. It would be good fun to have Dick on the afternoon's excursion! She had rather dreaded the journey alone into a strange part of the countryside, one might so easily get lost. Beside, Barbara knew in her heart of hearts that she had absolutely no right for her unfriendly attitude toward Dick Thornton. If he had chosen to treat her with less intimacy than in the beginning of their acquaintance, that was his own affair. If he now preferred Nona to her—well, he only showed a better judgment in desiring the finer girl.

Barbara now put her hand in a friendly fashion on Dick's sleeve.

"I am awfully glad to have you come along and I am sure Gene will be," she answered happily. "Lead on, Sir Knight, to the nearest street car."

After an hour's ride into the country, through one of Belgium's suburbs, Dick and Barbara arrived at a tumble-down shed. Eugenia had carefully described this shed as their first destination.

Not far off they found Bibo waiting for them with a rickety old wagon and an ancient horse. Money and Eugenia's determined character had secured the forlorn equipage. For it was difficult to buy any kind of horse or wagon in these war days.

However, the small driver, who was the boy Eugenia had rescued some weeks before, drove with all the pomp of the king's coachman. That is, he allowed the old horse to pick her way along a grass-grown path for about a mile. Then he invited his two passengers to get down, as there was no road up to the old house that a horse and wagon could travel.

So Dick and Barbara found themselves for the first time in their acquaintance wandering along a country lane together. Their position was

not very romantic, however. Barbara led the way along the same narrow avenue that Eugenia had followed on the day of her first visit to the supposedly deserted place.

Yet although Barbara almost ran along in her eagerness to arrive, Dick noticed that she looked very thin. She was not the Barbara of his first acquaintance; something had changed her. Well, one could hardly go through the experiences of this war without changing, even if one were only an outsider. And Dick Thornton glanced at his own useless arm with a tightening of his lips. He probably owed his life to the little girl ahead of him.

Eugenia did not at first see her guests approaching until they had discovered her. She was in the front yard and the grass had been cut, so that there was a broad cleared space. Moreover, every window of the supposedly haunted house was thrown wide open, so that the sun and air poured in.

It was as little like either a deserted or a haunted house as one could humanly imagine. For there were eight or ten children at this moment in the yard with Eugenia. She held a baby in her arms and a small boy stood close beside her.

Barbara saw the little fellow at the same moment she recognized her friend. Instantly she decided that he was the most exquisite child she had ever seen in her life. The boy was like a small prince, although he wore only the blue cotton overalls and light shirt such as the other boys wore.

But he must have said something to Eugenia, for she glanced up and then ran forward to meet her guests. The baby she dumped hastily into her discarded chair.

"But I thought I was to be your guest of honor, Gene?" Barbara protested a few moments later. "Never should I have allowed Dick to come if I had dreamed he was to put me in the shade so completely."

Eugenia laughed. Her new responsibilities did not appear to have overburdened her.

"Come and meet my family," she insisted. "There was an old woman who lived in a shoe, who had so many children she didn't know what to do."

CHAPTER VI
The Locked Door

"But she seems to me a very unusual person to be a servant, Gene," Barbara remarked argumentatively. "Of course, I know she was wearing a maid's apron and cap so that her hair was completely hidden, and her dark glasses concealed her eyes. Still, I could see very plainly the woman you call 'Louise' is not an everyday servant. She spoke to Dick and me with perfect self-possession, although she did seem nervous. But it is ridiculous to think one can hide a personality under such a slight disguise."

Barbara spoke pettishly. She and Eugenia were wandering about the big house together. They were looking over the arrangements Eugenia had made for her recently acquired family. These were, of course, of the most primitive kind. There were about eighteen army cots in the bedrooms, some light coverings, and a few wooden chairs. In the big front room downstairs long planks had been laid across wooden supports. This formed a large and informal dining room table. Yet by accident this same room contained a magnificent Flemish oak sideboard that had been left in the house by the former owners of the place.

However, Barbara and Eugenia were in Eugenia's own bedroom when the present conversation started. They had already seen the lower floor of the house, where Barbara had been introduced to Eugenia's cook, who was a plain Flemish woman. But it was the history of the housemaid, a woman of between forty and fifty, whose identity Barbara was questioning.

In reply Eugenia gazed at her friend earnestly for a few moments and then slowly shook her head.

"These are war times, Bab. I thought you and I had agreed long ago to ask no unnecessary questions."

Eugenia had seated herself on the side of her cot bed, Barbara was on a high wooden box, which served as a chair, near the window.

She did not reply at first, but this was merely because she was thinking, not because she intended to consider Eugenia's suggestion.

She had one foot crossed under her, while the other swung in the air. Her brow was wrinkled into a painfully heavy frown for so miniature a person. Unconsciously Barbara pulled meditatively at a brown curl that had escaped from the knot at the back of her head.

During her long study Eugenia smiled at her guest. She too could not grow accustomed to considering Barbara as responsible a person as the rest of the Red Cross girls. This was only because of her appearance, for she had learned to have faith in her.

All of a sudden Barbara began talking again, just where she had left off.

"It is all very well to preach, Gene, about not asking unnecessary questions because we are living and working in war times. But you know very well we never expected that point of view to apply to asking questions of each other. We came abroad as strangers, except that Mildred and I knew each other slightly, but since then we have become friends. At least, we care a great deal about each other's interests. Now I don't think for a minute we have the right to keep secrets from one another. That is, unless they happen to be of a kind one simply can't bear to tell." And at this Barbara hesitated for an instant.

"But about this woman, this 'Louise', we were discussing. Eugenia, you know perfectly well she isn't a real servant. I am dreadfully afraid you are hiding some one and it may get you into serious trouble," the younger girl continued, making no effort to hide her anxiety. "Really, you ought to be careful, Gene. You came to Europe to act as a Red Cross nurse, not to interfere with questions of government. If you do, you may be put into prison, or something else dreadful. Do you know I thought all along it was funny your deciding so suddenly to give up your Red Cross work and then knowing exactly where to find a house. Well, I might as well tell you," Barbara now got off her stool and came over and put a hand on either of her friend's shoulders, "I mean to find out what you are trying to hide if I possibly can," she concluded.

Eugenia did not stir. But she let her own dark eyes rest gravely upon Bab's blue ones.

"Please don't," she asked. "I suppose I might have guessed that you would have discovered there is something unusual about my family. But, Bab, I want you to promise me on your honor that you will not mention your suspicion to any one—not to Nona, or Mildred, or Dick Thornton. I am trying in a fashion to help some one who is in deep trouble. As you have guessed, she is a woman, and that was her little boy, Jan, whom you saw standing by me when you arrived. But if questions are asked of you, Barbara, you know absolutely nothing of this. I prefer to manage my own affairs."

Eugenia made this announcement in her haughtiest fashion. However, her companion was not deceived. Eugenia simply meant that if disaster followed her attempt to shield a prisoner, she alone must bear the penalty.

Quietly for another moment, still with her hands on the older girl's shoulders, Barbara continued to consider the situation.

"I won't make you any promises, Gene," she answered at last. "I must decide what to do later. But I won't tell Nona, or Mildred, or Dick, as I can't see any special point in confiding in them at present. However, I am not willing to stand aside and let you run deliberately into danger. It was all very well your taking care of Captain Castaigne. He was desperately ill. Your finding him wounded on the battlefield was so romantic. But this is quite a different affair. We were under certain obligations to the Countess Amelie, while this 'Louise' and her 'Jan' are utter strangers. I think I'll go this instant and tell the woman she has no right to make you undergo such risks."

Again Eugenia did not stir, but this time neither did Barbara.

"You will do no such thing, my dear; you must let me manage my life for myself," she declared quietly instead. "Of course, I am not going to take any more chances than I must. Come now, let us go downstairs and have tea. You and Dick were angels to have come on such a long journey and you must be nearly famished. I have managed to get a few supplies in Brussels

and I have sent to Boston for a great many more. So when you girls are able to visit me, we can at least regale ourselves with a Boston Tea Party."

Eugenia put an arm across Barbara's shoulder as they moved toward the door.

A few feet further on the younger girl stopped. "Are you very rich, Eugenia Peabody?" she demanded. "Unless you are, it is perfectly mad for you to have undertaken the expenses of this household. Most of these children have not had anything to eat for a year and must be nearly famished."

Eugenia nodded. "I suppose I am fairly wealthy, although I find it hard to realize it, as I grew up such a poor girl."

"Then why—why, Eugenia (I have been simply dying to ask you this ever since you told us you were rich)—why did you wear such old-fashioned—if you will excuse me—such perfectly awful clothes?"

Barbara fairly shuddered, recalling how she and Nona and Mildred had suffered over Eugenia's ancient Alpine hat.

But Eugenia only laughed. She had been sensitive enough over the other girls' attitude toward her appearance when they first knew one another. But Barbara's way of expressing things was too absurd.

"I told you I had been so poor I didn't know how to spend money," she explained. "Besides, I have always been so plain it never occurred to me that clothes could make much difference in my appearance."

"Goose!" Barbara looked up at Eugenia searchingly. "If ever this wretched war is over, I mean to go with you to Paris and make you spend heaps and heaps of money on clothes. Nona and I have decided that we could make you look quite stunning if we had the money to spend. Then I should insist that you pay a visit to the Chateau d'Amelie. The Countess insisted you never could look like anything but a New England old maid, no matter what exquisite toilets you wore."

Then the younger girl's cheeks grew so hot that she could actually feel the tears being forced into her eyes.

"I wonder if I shall ever learn what to say and what not to say, Gene?" she asked wretchedly. "Oh, don't tell me you don't mind what I say. That is not the point. The trouble is I can't learn when to hold my tongue. I only wish the Countess could have seen you when Dick and I arrived today."

Eugenia was not wearing her nurse's uniform. Instead, she had fished an old gray crepon dress out of her trunk. But in order to make it more attractive for her little guests, she wore a white fichu about her neck. Then her hair was wound in two heavy braids around her head.

"There isn't any particular reason why I should deny being an old maid," she returned. "Only I am sorry that you girls discussed my appearance with a stranger."

Again Barbara flushed. "The Countess isn't a stranger to us, Gene," she apologized, "and I don't think you should feel that way toward her since you and Captain Castaigne have grown to be good friends. I don't see how you can still consider him unattractive. But you are terribly prejudiced, Eugenia."

The two girls had left Eugenia's bedroom and were now walking toward the back stairs.

All of a sudden, when Eugenia chanced to be unconscious of her companion, Barbara moved away. She at once placed her hand on the knob of a door leading into a room at the back of the house.

"Whose room is this, Eugenia? May I go inside and see?" she queried.

Her hand was upon the knob, but, of course, she made no effort to enter the room, awaiting the other girl's reply. She was interested merely because this seemed to be about the only room that Eugenia had not exhibited.

But Eugenia immediately looked unaccountably angry. Yet she had kept her temper perfectly through all Barbara's annoying speeches!

"Please don't attempt to go in that room, Barbara!" she ordered sharply, quite in the manner and temper of the former Eugenia. "If I had desired you to see the room I should have taken you into it myself."

"Oh, I beg your pardon," Barbara replied, angry with herself for the sudden lump that had risen in her throat. "I suppose this room is Bluebeard's chamber, or the place where you keep your ghost locked up. I did not mean to interfere."

"The room is not locked and is entirely empty," Eugenia replied. However, she must have parted with her New England conscience at the moment of making this statement. For Barbara had distinctly heard some one moving about inside the room. And quite by accident, as her hand turned the knob, she realized that the door *was* locked.

In the yard the two girls found Dick Thornton playing with the children. He had discovered some ivy growing on one side of the old house. Therefore, each girl and boy had been decorated with an ivy leaf, as if it were a badge of honor. Moreover, Dick also wore a leaf in his buttonhole.

"Louise" soon brought the tea, which Dick drank with satisfaction. Barbara tried to pretend that she enjoyed hers, but it was extremely difficult. Not that she was angry with Eugenia, for her discomfort went deeper than that. The fact is she was frightened for her.

Some one more important than "Louise" was being guarded by Eugenia. Who on earth the man or woman could be, Barbara could not even hazard a guess. Yet it must be some one whose safety her friend considered of great importance, for had she not deliberately lied to her?

Certainly Eugenia was facing a grave situation! At present no one suspected her of treason. She was simply regarded as an eccentric American woman, who desired to spend her money in caring for the destitute Belgian children. No outsider had yet visited her "Hotel des Enfants." But, of course, once the news that something unusual was going on in her establishment reached the German authorities, Eugenia could not hope to escape their vigilance a second time.

On the trip back into Brussels Dick Thornton found his companion unusually quiet. He was under the impression that it was because of the change in her once friendly attitude toward him. He was sorry, because he very much wanted to talk to her about a personal matter, but never found a sufficiently intimate moment.

Only once did she arouse herself in the effort to make conversation.

"Why do you happen to be wearing that spray of ivy so proudly, Dick?" she inquired carelessly. "I was amused at your decorating all the Belgian children with leaves."

Dick glanced carefully about, but the tram car was almost empty.

"Don't you understand what the ivy means?" he asked. "I expect it *was* pretty absurd of me. But the other day the German commandant ordered that no Belgian should wear his national colors. Indeed, they were not to be displayed anywhere. Well, the result is, that almost everybody one meets upon the street has been wearing a leaf of ivy lately."

Dick took the ivy spray from his coat and handed it to his companion.

"Do you know what ivy stands for?" he asked. "It means attachment, faithful unto death. Won't you wear this?"

But although Barbara took the shaded, dark green leaf into her hand and looked at it for a moment, she slowly shook her head.

"There is something charming and pathetic in the idea, Dick. Remember to tell the story to Mildred and Nona. And give the ivy to Nona; I am sure she would love to have it," Barbara finished, as she gave the leaf back to her companion.

CHAPTER VII
A Triangle

A curious division had developed between the four American Red Cross girls since their arrival in Belgium. Perhaps this was due to the arrangement of their work, perhaps to spiritual conditions which are not always easy to see or define.

Eugenia, for reasons of her own, had given up the regular Red Cross nursing, preferring to devote herself to the children whom the war had made homeless. After Barbara's first visit to her and the discussion that had arisen between them, she had not urged the younger girl to come to see her often.

Barbara had been several times without invitation, but had not referred to their past difference. Indeed, she hoped that Eugenia would believe the idea had completely vanished from her mind. Nevertheless, she watched affairs at the old house more closely than her friend dreamed. There were other suspicious circumstances that Barbara kept tabulated. Later on, if she considered Eugenia in danger, she meant to fight for her and with her when the occasion arose.

However, Barbara had her own life and labor to occupy her time and was apparently busier than ever before. For although she and Nona and Mildred were working at the same hospital, they saw very little of one another.

The American Red Cross hospitals in Brussels were not given up entirely to the care of the wounded soldiers. The Germans looked after their own men and their prisoners as well. But there were many ill and friendless Belgians, unable to leave their country, who must have died without the help of the American Red Cross.

Fifty thousand Belgian babies were born during the first year of the present war. Their fathers had either been killed in defence of their country or were away at the front fighting with their king. So there were fifty thousand mothers as well as babies who must be looked after.

Barbara's work was among the women and children in the American hospital, while Mildred and Nona were engaged in general nursing. The hospital was not a large one; indeed, it had been a private home before the coming of the Germans. But the Red Cross Societies of the United States had outfitted the hospital and only American doctors and nurses were taking part in the relief work.

So both from choice and opportunity Mildred and Nona were frequently together. They shared the same bedroom and grew daily more intimate.

This had not been true at first. Indeed, Barbara had appeared as the favorite of both girls, until a new bond had developed between them.

Always Mildred Thornton had been peculiarly devoted to her brother, Dick. Even in his selfish, indolent days in New York City she had been unable to see his faults. In her heart she had resented Barbara Meade's criticism of him. Now it was charming to find that Nona was as enthusiastic about Dick as she was.

Whenever the opportunity came, the three of them used to go upon long excursions about Brussels. They visited the Royal Museums, the Palais des Beaux Arts, the parks, the Palais de Justice, which is the largest and most beautiful modern building in the world. And these parties did each member of the expedition a great deal of good. No one of them ever neglected work for pleasure, but the occasional happy times kept them cheerful and well.

It might have been better for Barbara had she shared these amusements. But after inviting her three or four times, finding that she always refused, the others made no further efforts to persuade her. For they seemed to be extremely content to be three, in spite of the old adage.

Indeed, Mildred cherished the unexpressed hope that Dick might be falling in love with Nona. So whenever it was possible she used to leave the two of them together. But she was wise enough never to have made this conspicuous. Neither had she intimated any such idea either to her friend or brother.

But it was fairly simple to find one self interested in a picture at one end of a gallery when her two companions were strolling in the opposite direction.

Also one could grow suddenly weary just as the others had expressed the desire to investigate some remote picture or scene.

Certainly it is not usual for a devoted sister to wish her only brother to marry. But then, Mildred Thornton was an exceptional girl. Selfishness had never been one of her characteristics, and, moreover, she was deeply devoted to Nona. Besides this, she felt that the best possible thing that could happen to Dick was to marry an attractive girl. For ever since the loss of the use of his arm Mildred had feared that he might become morose and unhappy. Indeed, he had seemed both of these things during their stay in Paris. It was only since coming into Brussels that he had regained a portion of his old debonair spirit. So naturally Mildred believed Nona to have been largely responsible for this.

There were few people in their senses who would have cared at the present time to dispute Nona Davis' charm and beauty. She had always been a pretty girl, but the past year in Europe had given her a delicate loveliness that made persons stop to gaze at her as she passed them on the street. A great deal of her former shyness had passed away. In spite of the hard work and the sight of so much undeserved suffering, she had grown stronger physically.

For before coming to Europe Nona had led too shut-in and conservative a life. She had almost no friends of her own age and her poverty was not a pretence like Eugenia's, but a very certain and to her a very distasteful thing.

Nona wanted to see the world and to occupy an important place in it. In spite of her real talent for her work and her unusual courage under danger, she had no thought of being a hospital nurse all her life.

Nona's father was an old man at her birth. He had once belonged to a family of wealth and prominence. But after the civil war had destroyed his fortune he had made little effort to rise superior to circumstances. Yet he had spent a great many hours talking to Nona about the true position which she *should* occupy and telling her long stories of her family's past.

Charleston, South Carolina, is one of the most beautiful and at the same time one of the most old-fashioned cities in the world. The tide of the new

American life and spirit has in a measure swept past it. At least the new Americanism had never entered the doors of Nona's home during her father's lifetime.

The old gentleman would have perished had he dreamed of his daughter's becoming a trained nurse. However, after his death Nona had felt a strong impulse toward the profession and so far had never regretted the step.

But it was true that she had been greatly influenced by the possible romance and adventure in her decision to help with the Red Cross work in Europe. This did not mean that Nona was not tremendously in earnest. But she was a girl who had read a great deal and dreamed many dreams. All her life poetry and passion would appeal to her more than cold arrangements of facts. There was no fault in this, it was merely a matter of temperament. Perhaps it was partly responsible for the soft light in Nona's brown eyes with their curiously golden iris. Also she had a fashion of opening her lips slightly when she was specially interested in a subject, as if she wished to breathe in the essence of the idea.

A part of Nona's dreaming was due to the fact that she had never known her mother after she was a small girl. More than this, she had been brought up in such curious ignorance of her mother's history. Any child in the world must have dreamed strange dreams under like circumstances.

Often Nona used to have a vision of her mother coming to stand at her bedside. Always she appeared dressed in the white muslin and blue ribbons, in which she remembered seeing her on a special Sunday afternoon.

Moreover, there was always the question of her mother's family to be pondered over. Naturally Nona believed that her mother must have been a great lady. Her imagination even went so far as to conceive of her as a foreign princess, who for reasons of state had been suddenly carried off to her own land.

Until she grew old enough to laugh at herself, Nona often sat with her delicate little nose pressed against the window pane in the drawing room of her old Charleston home. If questions were asked she could invent many reasons to explain her presence. She was actually waiting for a splendid coach and four to drive up to the door and bear her away. The coach was

always decorated with a splendid coat of arms, and for some absurd childish reason the coachman and footmen were dressed in pumpkin-colored satin and wore tall black top hats.

As a matter of fact, as Nona Davis grew older these ridiculous fancies faded; nevertheless, a few of her old dreams remained. For one thing, she retained the impression that her mother had probably been a foreigner. Yet she never could understand why, even after her father's death, his few old friends continued to decline to give her any information. Surely one of them must know something of her mother.

It was all too mysterious and disheartening. On coming to Europe, Nona had made up her mind to put the trying mystery back of her and to forget it as completely as she could. In a measure she had succeeded, but since her confession to the Red Cross girls the old haunting desire had come back to her. She *must* find out whether her mother was dead or living and in either case why she had been told nothing of her.

Then suddenly one day, without knowing why, she chose Dick Thornton for a confidant. More than this, she asked for his advice. Whatever the mystery, it was her right to be told the exact truth, she insisted, and Dick agreed with her.

This was on one of the occasions when they were walking together out from Brussels in the direction of the sea. They were not allowed to travel very far, since the roads were all patrolled by German soldiers in command of the fortifications along the way.

Mildred had chosen to rest for a few moments, so that Dick and Nona were alone. Not that Mildred's presence would have interfered; this was simply an accident.

Dick listened with unusual gravity to Nona's history. Perhaps it struck him as even queerer than it did the girl herself. She had always been accustomed to the mystery. Really, the entire story sounded like a fabrication. Mysteries were out of fashion in these modern days in the United States. Although, of course, there was nothing too mad or too inconceivable that was not taking place in Europe at the present time.

Nothing was more antagonistic to Dick Thornton's nature than concealment of any kind. Yet he felt profoundly touched by Nona's confession. The girl herself was so attractive! She was still wearing the black silk dress and hat she had bought in Paris the autumn before. Her face had flushed, partly from embarrassment and partly from the emotion she always felt at any mention of her mother.

Her eyes were luminous and brown and her features as exquisitely carved as a Greek statue's.

Dick also had no other idea except that Nona's mother must have been a woman of grace and breeding. The daughter was entirely aristocratic to the tips of her slender fingers. For half a moment Dick thought of suggesting that he or Mildred write to their own mother for advice. In reality Mrs. Thornton would have enjoyed tremendously the unveiling of an *agreeable* mystery. But only if she should discover in the end that Nona was the heir to a fortune or a great name. If the conclusion of the mystery were disagreeable Mrs. Thornton would be profoundly bored.

Therefore he naturally hesitated. "I don't know exactly what to advise, Nona," he confessed, since they were by this time calling each other by their first names. "The sensible thing is to write to your lawyer and demand to be told all that can be found out. If there are any letters or papers, you must be twenty-one, so they are legally yours. Then perhaps with something to go on, you can find out the truth later for yourself. Only please don't consider my advice too seriously."

Here Dick's manner and voice both changed. He had grown accustomed to relying upon his own strength and decision in the past year. Yet every once in a while he remembered that not many months before he had seldom given a serious thought to any subject except deciding what girl he should invite to the theater or a dance.

"It was awfully kind of you to have thought my judgment worth while," he concluded. Then his sudden turning of the subject of conversation surprised Nona.

"I have a secret of my own which I may some day tell you, because I hope to have the benefit of your advice," he added. "At present I am not sure

whether it would be wise to speak of it. For so far there is nothing to be done with my secret but smile and bear it like a man."

Then Dick smiled. "Do you know, I have been thinking lately that perhaps it is the women who smile and bear their burdens. A man is rather apt to want to make a noise when he is hurt."

Nona glanced down at Dick's sleeve. "I don't think you have a right to accuse yourself of that fault," she said gently.

But Dick shook his head. "I was not thinking of my arm; I am learning to get on fairly comfortably with one arm these days."

CHAPTER VIII
A Prison and a Prisoner

One afternoon one of the young doctors in the American hospital invited Barbara to go with him to visit one of the German prisons. These prisons sheltered a number of wounded British and French soldiers. There were scarcely a sufficient number of hospitals to take care of the German wounded alone.

Dr. Mason, the young American surgeon, was about twenty-five years old. He had been sent into Belgium by the Red Cross societies in his own village in Minnesota. So, although his home and Barbara Meade's were many miles apart, at least they were both westerners. On this score they had claimed a fellow feeling for each other.

The truth was Dr. Mason felt sorry for Barbara. She seemed so young and so much alone in the unhappy country they had come to serve. She did not seem to wish to be intimate with the other American nurses at their hospital and her two former friends evidently neglected her.

So only with the thought of being kind, Dr. Mason had issued his invitation. He was not attracted by Barbara. She seemed rather an insignificant little thing except for her big blue eyes. This was partly because Barbara so seldom laughed these days. There was little in Belgium that one could consider amusing. Just now and then she did manage to bubble over inside when no one was noticing. For there is no world so sad or so dull that it does not offer an occasional opportunity for laughter.

Certainly an excursion to a prison could scarcely be considered an amusing expedition. Nevertheless, Barbara accepted the invitation with alacrity, although she had previously declined far pleasanter suggestions from Dick Thornton and the two girls.

But she had several reasons for her present decision. She liked Dr. Mason and she was interested to see the inside of a German prison. Moreover, it

was not unpleasant to have her friends find out that other persons found her agreeable.

Have you ever been in the ridiculous state of mind of secretly yearning to be intimate with an old friend and yet refusing the opportunity when it is offered you? It is a common enough state of mind and usually comes from a curious combination of wounded pride and affection. Yet it is a difficult mood to get the better of and often one must wait for time to bring the adjustment.

If Barbara had not been a Red Cross nurse she would never have been allowed to accompany the American surgeon to the German prison. But as he might need some one to assist him in cases of severe illness among the prisoners, Barbara's presence would not be resented.

The prison was a short distance out from the city of Brussels. It had formerly been used for persons committing civil offenses, but was now a military prison.

The building was of rough stone and was situated in the center of a large court yard. It was built around an enclosed square, where the prisoners were sometimes allowed to enjoy air and exercise.

But conditions were not so unpleasant here as in many other places, although the discipline was fairly severe. For the Germans were making their prisoners useful.

In the early spring crops had been planted by the imprisoned men upon many of the waste spaces of conquered Belgium. Now the prisoners were employed in reaping some of the harvests. Only a small proportion of the food would ever fall to their consumption, yet the work in the fields was far better for the health and spirits of the captured men than idleness. It left them less time for thinking of home and for fretting over the cruel fortunes of war.

Barbara and Dr. Mason drove out to the German prison in one of the automobiles connected with their hospital. On the outside frame of the car was the Red Cross sign with their motto: "Humanity and Neutrality."

The German commandant of the prison was a big, blond fellow, disposed to be friendly. Straightway he invited the two Americans to investigate the prison, declaring that the Germans had nothing to conceal in the treatment of their captives.

Dr. Mason, however, was a strictly business-like person. He insisted upon seeing the sick men first. After doing what he could to relieve them, if there were time, they would then be pleased to inspect the prison.

So Barbara and the young physician were shown into a big room on the top floor of the building. A sentry sat on a stool outside the door. Inside there were a dozen cots, but not another article of furniture. The room was fairly clean, but was lighted only by two small windows near the ceiling and crossed with heavy iron bars.

On the cots were half a dozen French and as many English soldiers. Several of them were evidently very ill, the others were merely weak and languid. A heavy-footed German woman, more stupid than unkind, was the solitary nurse.

Once again Barbara had a return of her half whimsical, half sorrowful outlook upon life. This excursion with Dr. Mason was in no sense a pleasant one.

For no sooner had she entered the sick room than she moved with her peculiar light swiftness toward the bed of a young soldier. His arms were thrown up over his head, as if even the faint light in the room tortured him.

Barbara pulled his arms gently down. As she did this he made no effort to resist, but murmured something in French which she could not comprehend. Yet at the same moment she discovered that the boy's eyes were bandaged and that he had a quantity of yellow hair, curling all over his head in ringlets like a baby's.

The German nurse strode over beside them.

"He is blind; no hope!" she announced bluntly.

At the same instant Barbara's arms went around the boy soldier. For hours he must have been fighting this terrible nightmare alone. Now to hear his

own worst fears confirmed in such a cold, unfeeling fashion swept the last vestige of his courage away.

Barbara literally held the young fellow in her arms while he shook as if with ague. Then he sobbed as if the crying tore at his throat.

Barbara made no effort not to cry with him. She kept murmuring little broken French phrases of endearment which she had learned from her year's work in France, all the time patting the boy's shoulder.

He was a splendidly built young fellow with a broad chest and strong young arms. Even his injury and the confinement had not broken his physical strength. This made the thought of his affliction even harder to bear, to think that so much fine vigor must be lost from the world's work.

"I don't believe it is true that you are going to be blind forever," Barbara whispered, as soon as she could find her voice. She had no real reason for her statement, except that the boy must be comforted for the moment. But he had covered up his eyes as though the light hurt them, and if he were totally blind neither light nor darkness would matter.

Dr. Mason had at once crossed the room to talk to another patient. But at the sound of sobbing, he had turned to find his companion.

Certainly Barbara was entirely unconscious of the charming picture she made. She was so tiny, and yet it was her strength and her sympathy at this moment that were actually supporting the young soldier.

Never before had the young American physician looked closely at Barbara. Now he wondered how he could ever have believed her anything but pretty. Her white forehead was wrinkled with almost motherly sympathy. Then even while her eyes overflowed, her red lips took a determined line.

With a glance over her shoulder she summoned the physician.

"Please tell this boy you will do everything in your power to see that his eyes are looked after before it is too late," she pleaded. Then she stood up, still with her hand on the young Frenchman's shoulder.

"I am a Red Cross nurse. This is Dr. Mason, one of the surgeons who is giving his services to the American hospital in Brussels," she explained to

the boy, who had by this time managed to regain control of himself. "Miss Winifred Holt is coming over from New York just to look after the soldiers whose eyes have been injured in this war," Barbara continued. "Besides, I know there are eye specialists here who must be able to do something for you." Barbara's tone each instant grew more reassuring. "I am sure Dr. Mason and I will both persuade the prison officers to let you have the best of care. They are sure to be willing to have us do all that is possible for you."

By this time the young fellow had straightened himself up and taken hold of Barbara's other hand.

"You are more than kind," he answered, speaking with the peculiar courtesy of the French, "but it is useless! A shell exploded too near my face. No matter, it is all in the day's business! I was only thinking of my mother and our little farmhouse in Provence and of the French girl, Nicolete, who used to dance before our soldiers."

Suddenly Barbara smelt the odor of pinks and mignonette. For odors are more intimately associated with one's memories than any other of the senses. Then the next moment Barbara saw Eugenia and herself standing near the opening of a trench in southern France. As usual, they were arguing. But they were interrupted by a French soldier boy, who stood beside them holding out a small bunch of flowers. He had light hair and big blue eyes and rosy cheeks like a girl's.

"Monsieur Bebé," Barbara whispered.

Relieved that Dr. Mason and the German nurse had both been called to attend to another patient, Barbara now climbed up on the cot and sat beside the French boy.

"I want to tell you something that no one else must hear," she went on, lowering her voice until it was as mysterious as possible.

"You do not know it, but you and I are old friends. At least, we have met before, and that is enough to make us friends in war times. Besides, you once gave me a bouquet. Do you remember two Red Cross nurses to whom you gave some flowers that you and the other soldiers had made grow in the

mouth of your trench? Then afterwards we both watched Nicolete dance and you threw her a spray of mignonette?"

"Yes, yes," the boy answered, clutching now at Barbara's skirt as if she were a real link with his own beloved land. "It is the good God who has sent you here to help me. You will write my mother and say things are well with me. It will be time enough for her to hear the truth if I ever go home."

"You are going to get well, but if you don't you shall at least go home," Barbara returned resolutely. "The Germans are exchanging prisoners, you know. But I have another secret to tell you if you will promise not to tell."

The boy, who had been crying like a cruelly hurt child the moment before, was now smiling almost happily. Barbara could be a little witch when she chose.

She put her own curly brown head in its white nurse's cap down close beside the boy's blond one.

"What would you give to have that same little French girl, Nicolete, talk to you some day not very far off?" she whispered. Then she told the story of Nicolete's coming into Belgium with Eugenia and of her living not far away in the house which Eugenia had taken. But she also made the boy promise not to breathe to any one the fact of Nicolete's identity. She was not supposed to be a French girl, but a little Belgian maid under the protection of a wealthy but eccentric American Red Cross nurse.

By the time Barbara had finished this conversation she was compelled to hurry away. But she promised to come again to the prison as soon as she was allowed. Dr. Mason needed her help.

There was far more work to be done than he expected. For the next two hours Barbara assisted in putting on bandages, in washing ugly places with antiseptic dressings, in doing a dozen difficult tasks.

Nevertheless, whenever Dr. Mason had a chance to glance toward his assistant she managed to smile back at him. It was a trick Barbara had when nursing. It was never a silly or an unsympathetic smile. It merely expressed her own readiness to meet the situation as cheerfully as possible.

But before the afternoon's work was over the young American doctor had become convinced that she was the pluckiest little girl he had ever worked with. What was more, she was one of the prettiest.

However, though the nurse and doctor were both worn out when their service for the day was over, they were not to be allowed to return to the hospital at once. The German officer in command still insisted that they be shown about the prison building and yard.

CHAPTER IX
A Second Acquaintance

Barbara did not enjoy the thought of being shown over the prison. For one thing, she was tired; another, she feared she would find the imprisoned soldiers terribly downcast. She had nursed among them so long she felt a deep sympathy for their misfortunes.

Yet she discovered that the imprisoned soldiers go through about the same variety of moods as men and women engaged in ordinary occupations. They have their sad days and their cheerful days. There are times when the confinement and depression seem unendurable, and others when a letter comes from home with good news. Then one is immediately buoyed up.

It was now between four and five o'clock on a summer's afternoon.

Barbara and Dr. Mason went through the prison hastily. There was nothing interesting in the sight of the ugly, over-crowded rooms; but fortunately at this hour most of the men were out of doors.

So, as soon as they were allowed, the two Americans gladly followed the German commandant out into the fresh air. They had not been permitted to talk to the prisoners and Dr. Mason had made no such effort. It was merely through the courtesy of the German commandant that the American physician and nurse were given the privilege of visiting the ill prisoners. Therefore, Dr. Mason considered it a part of his duty not to break any of the prison rules.

But Barbara, being a woman, had no such proper respect for authority. Whenever the others were not looking she had frequently managed to speak a few words.

But she breathed better when they were again outdoors. It had been hot and sultry inside the prison, but now a breeze was blowing, stirring the leaves of the solitary tree in the prison yard to a gentle murmuring.

Underneath this tree was a group of a dozen or more soldiers. Some of them were smoking cherished pipes, while others were reading letters, yellow and dirty from frequent handling.

The International Red Cross had done its best to secure humane treatment for all the war prisoners in Europe. For this purpose there is a Bureau of Prisoners, having its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. They have sent forth a petition to the various governments at war, asking among other things that prisoners be allowed to receive money, letters and packages from their friends. These last must of course be carefully censored, and yet they keep life from growing unendurably dull. Think of long weeks and months going past with never a line from the outside world!

Barbara studied the faces of the imprisoned men closely. With all her experiences as a war nurse it chanced she had never before seen any number of prisoners. Now and then a few of them had passed her, being marched along the Belgian roads to the measure of the German goose step.

Now she managed to bow to the men resting under the tree and they returned her greeting in the friendliest fashion. Every Red Cross nurse is a soldier's friend. Yet in the character of an ordinary girl Barbara would have been almost as cordially received. She looked so natural and so human. Somehow one recalled once again the vision of "the girl one had left behind."

But Barbara was not to linger inside the prison yard. As the day was nearing its close the men who had been working in the fields were to return. The German commandant wished Dr. Mason to see how well his prisoners looked.

Surrounding the prison was a high stone wall. In the rear of this yard was a wide gate which could be swung back on hinges, allowing a half dozen men to be herded through at the same time.

So Dr. Mason and Barbara were escorted outside the prison wall and given chairs to await the marching past of the soldiers.

Barbara sat down gratefully enough. But when five or ten minutes passed and nothing happened she found herself growing bored. Dr. Mason could not talk to her. The German officer was discoursing so earnestly in his own

language that it was plain the American physician had to devote all his energies to the effort to understand him.

So by and by, when neither of the men was observing her, Barbara got up and strolled a few paces away. There was little to see except the stretch of much-traveled road. The fields where the prisoners were at work were more than a mile away.

But the girl's attention was arrested by an unmistakable sound. It was the noise of the imprisoned soldiers being marched back to their jail. The tread was slow and dead, without animation or life. It was as if the men had been engaged in tasks in which they had little concern and were being returned to a place they hated.

Barbara stood close to the edge of the road along which the men must pass. She was naturally not thinking of herself. So it had not occurred to her that the soldiers might be surprised by her unexpected appearance.

She was frowning and her blue eyes were wide open with excitement. She had left her nurse's coat thrown over the back of her chair. So she wore her American Red Cross uniform, whose white and crimson made a spot of bright color in the late afternoon's light.

A young French soldier in the first line of prisoners chanced to catch Barbara's eye. She smiled at him, half wistful and half friendly. Instantly the young fellow's hand went up to his cap, as he offered her the salute a soldier pays his superior officer.

Then the prisoners were all seized with the same idea at the same time. For as each line of soldiers, with their guards on either side, passed the spot where Barbara was standing, every hand rose in salute.

The girl was deeply touched. But she was not alone in this feeling. The American physician had a husky sensation in his throat and his glasses became suddenly blurred. The German commandant of the prison said "A-hum, a-hum," in an unnecessarily loud tone.

There was nothing in the spectacle of the girl herself being thus honored by the imprisoned men that was particularly affecting. The truth was it was not Barbara who was being saluted, but the uniform she wore, the white ground

with its cross of crimson. In a world of hate and confusion and sometimes of despair the Red Cross still commands universal respect.

Barbara could not see distinctly the faces of the soldiers. She recognized them to be both French and English and of various ages and ranks. But there were too many of them and they moved too rapidly to study the individual faces. However, as the men finally entered the prison gate the line halted a moment. Then something must have occurred to delay them still more. Six or eight rows of men were compelled to stand at attention.

One of the guards near Barbara moved ahead to find out what caused the obstruction. This was Barbara's chance to get a good look at the soldiers. So she began with the one in the line directly opposite her.

The young man was undeniably an Englishman. He was about six feet tall and as lean as possible without illness. He wore no hat and his hair was tawny as the hay he had just been cutting. Moreover, his eyes were the almost startling blue that one only sees with a bronzed skin.

He did not look unhappy or bored, but extremely wide awake and "fit," as the English say. Besides this, he seemed enormously interested in Barbara. Obviously the young soldier was a gentleman, and yet equally obvious was the fact that he was staring.

All at once Barbara moved forward a few steps until she was nearer the prisoner than she should have been. This was because she had seen him somewhere before but could not for the moment recall his name.

"Lieutenant Hume!" Barbara exclaimed suddenly under her breath. "I am sorry; I did not know you were a prisoner!"

The young soldier did not move a muscle in his face, yet his eyes answered the girl with sufficient eloquence.

There was not a second to be lost. Barbara knew the prisoner was not allowed to speak to her. Also she was not expected to speak to him. But she had an unlooked-for chance to say a few words, and what feminine person would have failed to seize the opportunity!

"We are nursing here in Brussels, all of us," she went on rapidly, keeping as careful a lookout as possible. "The other girls will be grieved to hear of your bad luck. If possible, would you like one of us to write you?"

For half a second Lieutenant Hume's rigidity relaxed. Yet once again his answer was in the look he flashed at the girl. Then next the order came. The soldiers were marched inside the prison and the gate swung to.

Immediately after Barbara and Dr. Mason started back to the hospital.

Really, Barbara felt ashamed of herself, she was such an extraordinarily dull companion during the return journey. But she was both tired and excited.

What an extraordinary experience to have spent a few hours at a German prison and to have discovered two acquaintances. True, poor Monsieur Bebé was scarcely an acquaintance, yet she had seen and spoken to him before. As for Lieutenant Hume, he was almost a friend. At least, he had been a friend of Nona's. She would be grieved to hear of his misfortune and no doubt would try to be kind to him if it were possible.

As for Barbara, she meant to devote her energies to doing what she could for the young Frenchman. If he were totally blind, surely the German authorities might be persuaded to exchange him for one of their own men, should proper interest be shown in his case. As soon as possible Barbara decided she would go and consult Eugenia. She would be sure to have some intelligent suggestion to make.

Barbara and Dr. Mason said farewell to each other outside the hospital front door, as the man had other work before him.

Just as he was leaving the girl slipped her small hand inside his.

"I have had a more interesting afternoon than you realize," she insisted, "and thank you for taking me with you. I am sorry that I have been such a tiresome companion on our way home."

The young man smiled down upon the tired little nurse. The fact that she was a nurse struck him as an absurdity, as it did almost every one else.

"You have been a perfect trump, Miss Meade, and if anybody is to blame it is I, for taking you upon such a fatiguing expedition. Will you go with me

upon a more cheerful excursion some day?"

Barbara nodded. Dr. Mason was looking at her with the frankest admiration and friendship. It was good to be admired and liked. Then she turned and disappeared inside the big hospital door.

Dr. Mason continued to think of her until he reached the house of his next patient.

CHAPTER X
A Discussion, not an Argument

"But very probably you were mistaken in thinking it was Lieutenant Hume," Nona announced. "I am sure he had not been taken prisoner when we left France."

Barbara raised herself on one elbow in her small bed and answered irritably:

"I most certainly was not mistaken, Nona Davis. I ought to know Robert Hume perfectly well after our meeting in Paris and his visit at the chateau. Besides, though he dared not speak, he showed that he recognized me. I even promised him that you would write him a note to the prison if it were possible." Then Barbara relaxed and sank down on her pillow again.

She and Nona and Mildred were in her small room at the hospital. It was time for them all to have been in bed and asleep, since they chanced not to be engaged in night nursing. But Barbara had retired early, as she was extremely tired. Then, some time after, Nona and Mildred had crept in to find out what had become of her. They had missed her during the afternoon, but had not known of her expedition with Dr. Mason.

Now Nona looked annoyed.

"What an extraordinary thing, Barbara, for you to promise! I am sure I see no reason in the world why I should write Lieutenant Hume. We are only acquaintances. Of course, I am sorry to know he is in hard luck. But for me to begin writing him under the circumstances would look as if we were intimate friends."

Barbara slipped her arms up over her head, making a kind of oval frame for her face.

Nona and Mildred were seated on either side the foot of her bed.

"I think you are absurd, Nona," she commented, in the frank fashion which was not always either advisable or pleasant. "I really don't believe I did say you would write, only that one of us would. Naturally, I thought as you knew Lieutenant Hume best you would prefer it. I don't consider he would think you were being *too* friendly with him. He is too much of a gentleman. He would understand that you were sorry for his hard luck and pitied his loneliness. I wonder if it was because you were brought up in the south that you are so conventional? You don't seem to be so all the time, only when it suits you. I am sure I will write the note to Lieutenant Hume with pleasure if I find he is allowed to receive letters except from his family."

Evidently Barbara was in a mood when it made but little difference to her whether or not she made Nona Davis angry. Yet she and Nona had once seemed to be devoted to each other and appeared to be friendly now.

Nona, however, was not given to quarreling. So, although she flushed uncomfortably, she made no immediate answer.

Mildred, however, broke into the conversation hastily.

"Well, you did have an extraordinarily interesting afternoon, Barbara, though it must have been a trying one. I confess Nona and Dick and I were all hurt when we found you had gone out without even speaking of your intention. We have asked you to go with us any number of times. Dick said he did not suppose you knew any one in the hospital well enough to have accepted an invitation."

At this Barbara rose up to a half-sitting position, still with her arm-encircled head leaning against her pile of pillows.

"Was Dick here this afternoon?" she inquired, wondering within herself why she felt pleased over Dick's hearing of her departure.

"Oh, he only stopped by for a moment to bring Nona a book," Mildred added. "I just chanced to see them as I was passing by in the hall. But you look very tired, Barbara. Would you like Nona and me to leave you? You can tell us more of your experiences another time. But I advise you to ask Dick if he can make any suggestions about the poor little Frenchman. Monsieur Bebé sounds so pathetic. You know Dick may have something

worth while to propose. He is doing such splendid work with the Relief Committee."

Barbara patted Mildred's hand gently and, it must be confessed, a little condescendingly.

"You are apt to think Dick does everything well, Mill, aren't you," she announced, "whether it is looking after the starving Belgians or leading a dance in a ball room? Still, I don't think I shall trouble him. I have a plan of my own in mind for the boy and I am going out to see Eugenia to ask if she thinks it feasible. Then if she thinks it is, I shall go ahead and see what can be accomplished."

"And leave all of us completely in the dark," Nona added. "I must confess, Barbara, I don't think it kind of you to speak to Mildred about Dick in such a superior, almost scornful, fashion. In the last few weeks we have both been aware that you did not care to be intimate with us. But whatever we may have done, I can't see how Dick Thornton can have merited your disapproval. I don't believe you have even seen him alone."

Barbara's cheeks flared. "And I wonder how you formed that opinion, Nona? However, it strikes me as none of your business."

The instant Barbara had made this speech she was sorry. One was always at a disadvantage in a quarrel with Nona Davis. For Nona never for a moment forgot her dignity or breeding. She was white now, while Barbara was crimson. Her lips were curling a little scornfully, but she answered quietly, "I am sorry to have made you angry; that was not my intention."

However, in spite of her apology, the younger girl remained absurdly aggrieved. Yet she had the grace to turn to Mildred.

"I am sure you understand, Mildred, that I never intended to be disagreeable about Dick. You must know that I admire him very much."

Mildred leaned over and deliberately pinched Barbara's flushed cheeks. "I know you are a little goose," she asserted, "to be quarreling with Nona as though you were two badly brought up children."

But Barbara was not to be appeased. She made no answer, and the next moment Nona slipped off the bed and knelt on the floor beside her.

"What is the matter, Bab? What is it that has been making you feel and behave so differently toward me lately? If I have been to blame in any way I apologize with all my heart. I confess I was absurd about Lieutenant Hume. I liked him very much the few times we met. I might at least be willing to do the poor fellow a kindness when he is in hard luck. But you see, he does not belong to a very good family in England. Though he behaves like a gentleman, after all he is only a gardener's son."

It was not Barbara who interrupted this time, but Mildred Thornton.

"That is nonsense, Nona," she protested. "I have heard you say something of that kind two or three times. Anyone who has traveled in the least knows that no gardener's son in England is educated as Lieutenant Hume is, nor has such perfectly self-possessed manners. Besides, he is a lieutenant."

Nona shook her head. "Yes, I know it does sound impossible," she returned. "But Lieutenant Hume told me himself that he was the son of the gardener when I first met him in Surrey. He was at home then, recovering from a wound in the leg and was lying asleep near the gardener's cottage. It has often struck me as queer since, but I have worked it all out. Lieutenant Hume must have been educated by some one who considered him unusual. And commissions have been given in the British army in this war for merit as well as for family reasons."

But Nona was evidently weary of the subject of the young English lieutenant. She had remained kneeling on the floor and she now took hold of Barbara's somewhat limp hand in a very sweet fashion.

"But you haven't said what the trouble is between us, Bab, or whether you are willing to forgive me?" she continued. "I should feel very unhappy if anything serious interrupted our friendship. Eugenia seems so far away these days and I don't believe she is anxious to have us come to see her often."

"Oh, Eugenia is busy," Barbara answered carelessly. "But it is all right, Nona; of course I am not angry with you. I was vexed for a moment, but I

expect that was because I am tired. It is ridiculous to suggest that there could be any serious trouble between us."

To the best of her ability Barbara tried to speak with sincerity. Nona looked exquisitely pretty and appealing as she knelt beside her. One would have forgiven her almost any offense. Yet Barbara could not truthfully convince herself that Nona had committed an offense against her. Nevertheless, she did not feel a return of her affection, although she struggled to have her manner at least appear unchanged.

But Nona was conscious of the difference, for she rose immediately to her feet.

"I am sorry we disturbed you tonight when you were so tired," she said, holding her chin just a little higher than usual. There was no change in the soft inflections of her voice. "Good night."

Then Nona left the room without looking back. But Mildred stopped to kiss Barbara. "You haven't been any too nice to me either, Mistress Barbara," she asserted. "If you don't reform I shall tell Dick and make him find out the reason why."

Of course Mildred made this speech without in the least meaning it. Nevertheless, after both girls had left the room and she should have been asleep, Barbara remembered. She sincerely hoped that Mildred would not be so tiresome as to tell Dick of their personal differences. But what was the root of the trouble between her and her two former friends?

For the life of her Barbara could not decide. Or, if at the depth of her heart she knew, she was not brave enough to confess the truth to herself.

CHAPTER XI
Monsieur Bebé

One sultry August afternoon Barbara went again to see Eugenia. This time she went alone.

According to his usual custom Bibo met her at the end of the car line with his ancient horse. Owing to his lameness perhaps, he was head coachman to Eugenia's establishment, which Barbara still insisted upon calling "L'Hotel des Enfants."

Bibo was looking extremely well. He had on long trousers of blue cotton and a blue cotton smock with a round collar. He had lost the frightened, starved look which Barbara remembered seeing on the evening of his rescue. The boy's face was round, there was a dimple in one corner of his brown cheek. His eyes were serene save for his sense of responsibility as Barbara's escort.

It is true that Bibo's mother was still held a prisoner in Brussels because of an act of disrespect to a German officer. But children's memories do not harass them so long as they are happy.

"How are things going, Bibo?" Barbara asked in French, as soon as she was seated beside her driver. Fortunately, French was the language of Eugenia's Belgium family rather than Flemish.

Bibo first flapped his reins and then nodded enthusiastically. Words at the moment appeared to fail him, although he was usually voluble.

"Then Gene is well?" Barbara continued. For after many difficulties Eugenia had acquired this informal title. In the beginning the children had struggled nobly with her name, but Miss Peabody was too much for them. Then "Miss Eugenia" was equally difficult for little Belgian tongues, so it became Madame Gene. Later, since Eugenia did not enjoy being called Madame, nor was she more fond of Mademoiselle, her name attained its simplest form among the younger children.

But Eugenia was Bibo's altar saint and he was not inclined to take liberties. Saint Gene she had been to him in truth!

"She is well," he answered briefly. Then he allowed his round eyes to leave his horse and turn ecstatically toward Barbara.

"In a few days my mother is to be with us. She wrote that she need stay no longer in prison and that she wished to see me, but alas, there was no place for us to go! Our home near Louvain was burned and my father—" The tones of the boy's voice expressed his uncertainty of his father's fate. "But my friend has written that my mother may come to our home; she will help us look after the other children. All will be well!"

Bibo's tone was so grown-up and he was so evidently quoting Eugenia that his companion smiled. But the smile was because Bibo could not possibly understand how one *could* cry over good news. How big was Eugenia's house and her sympathy these days? Certainly she seemed to wish it to include all who needed her help.

"And Monsieur Bebé?" Barbara next queried. "Does he appear more cheerful since I left him with you a week ago?"

The boy hesitated a little. "He laughed twice this morning and he sits all day in the sun and smiles now and then when Nicolete is beside him. But no one can be cheerful and blind."

This was spoken with conviction. Of his own affliction Bibo seldom thought, but indeed his lameness troubled him very little now. He could run and walk almost as well as the other boys. It had been hard at first, for until the day when their house had burned and they had been forced to escape, he had been exactly like other boys. But he had been stupid then and fallen. There had been no time to heal the hurt in his leg, so Bibo must hobble as best he might through an indifferent world.

But Barbara seemed extraordinarily well pleased by her companion's information. Poor Monsieur Bebé had been so far from smiling even once during his weeks in the prison hospital. And Barbara felt that she could claim some of the credit along with Eugenia for his release and better fortune.

Soon after her visit to the prison she had secured a prominent surgeon to go and look at the young Frenchman's eyes. The man could offer him little comfort. There was every chance that Monsieur Bebé, whose name was Reney, must continue blind. A little hope he might have, but hope was not encouragement.

In the depression that followed this announcement Barbara did her best to help the boy. But it was plain to his fellow prisoners and to the prison officers that the news had broken his health and spirit. He had no wish to live. He would not eat and after a time made no effort to get out of bed. He would lie all day without speaking, but rarely uttering a complaint.

Everybody was sorry for him, the big German nurse, the German guards, even the commandant of the prison. It was one thing to kill an enemy in the passion of battle, but another to see a boy, who had done one no personal harm, slowly passing away in darkness.

So when Barbara came to the German commandant with her plea for his prisoner's parole, he was willing to listen to her.

"What possible harm could be done if Monsieur Bebé, in reality Albert Reney, be transferred to Eugenia's home in the woods? She had offered the French boy shelter and care. He would make no effort to escape, but even if he should, a blind man could never again fight for his country. Moreover, Germany was arranging with the Allies for an exchange of blind prisoners. It was possible that Monsieur Reney might later on be sent home."

Eugenia was waiting this time near the place where Barbara was compelled to descend from Bibo's wagon. She had only one of her children with her, which was unusual, since she ordinarily went about with five or six. But Jan and Bibo were her two shadows. They were marked contrasts, since Bibo was so plainly a little son of the Belgian soil, the child and grandchild of farmers. Jan came of the men and women who have lived among pictures and books and helped make the history of his now tragic land.

The boy Jan was so instinctively a gentleman that, although he was not ten years old, he immediately upon Barbara's arrival slipped behind the two friends. For his happiness' sake he wished to keep his eyes fastened upon

his Gene, but he must not be close enough to overhear conversation that would not be intended for him.

Eugenia took Barbara's face between her beautiful, firm hands and gazed at her closely. Although in the first instant she saw that the girl wore the same look of the past few weeks, she said nothing. Only she put her arm about her as they walked toward the house.

Barbara did not feel like talking at first. She had been coming every week recently to the house in the woods and the visits always rested her. It did not seem possible that a few months could make so great a change as they had in Eugenia. One could scarcely have recognized her as the same girl who set sail from New York City a little more than a year before. But she was also changed from the girl who had crossed over from France earlier in the summer. In spite of her responsibilities Eugenia had grown ever so much larger; all the angular curves were gone, her chin was softly rounded. Beneath her pallor there was now a soft glow of pink, and best of all, the severe lines about her mouth had almost completely vanished. They could return if she were displeased, but the children rarely saw them.

"Something very worth while has come to you, Gene," Barbara whispered. "I wish you felt you could tell me what it is. Is it because you enjoy looking after the Belgian children?"

Eugenia nodded. "It is that and something else, but I don't feel that I can ever explain to any one."

Then Barbara and Eugenia were interrupted by two persons coming toward them from the opposite direction.

One was a splendid, big blond fellow whose eyes were bandaged. He was being led by a girl of about sixteen with jet-black hair which she wore short to her shoulders. She had dark eyes and crimson lips. Nicolete's costume and manner had both changed since her departure from France. But it was not possible to change the vivid coloring of her face.

Both the girl and boy were chattering rapidly, and both of them seemed happier than Barbara had lately seen them.

"The truth is all French people are homesick outside of their beloved France," Barbara thought to herself. "So it must be a consolation to have a fellow countryman for a companion."

But Monsieur Bebé was tremendously pleased to hear Barbara's voice. He asked her to take his hand and lead him back to his chair in the garden before the once deserted house. There, as a small chair chanced to be beside his, Barbara sat down. Then Nicolete and Eugenia went away to prepare tea.

Monsieur Bebé did his best to express his thanks to Barbara and he had the Frenchman's grace and choice of words. He was of course still desperately sad over his affliction, but meant if possible to meet it like a man. He had been willing to die for his country, but perhaps it took more courage to go on living for her. Miss Peabody had promised that as soon as possible he should begin to learn a trade.

After a quarter of an hour's talk Barbara felt in better spirits than she had on her arrival. Perhaps this was the secret with Eugenia. She was feeling that she was being useful to some one. It might help heal another kind of hurt. Certainly Barbara could feel that her interest in the young Frenchman had been worth while.

The two friends saw little of each other during the rest of the afternoon. But this was the usual thing and Barbara did not mind. She continued to stay out in the yard, sometimes watching the children play and at other times leading the games herself.

Eugenia came and went, now and then stopping for a few words of conversation. "Louise," the maid, rarely appeared. In all Barbara's visits she and "Louise" had not exchanged a dozen sentences. Indeed, it was self-evident that the woman did not wish to be noticed. Barbara respected her desire.

However, she understood perfectly by this time that "Louise" was not a servant, but some one who was living in Eugenia's house in order to conceal herself and her children. Jan had forgotten instructions and several times spoken to "Louise" as mother. There was also a little girl who was with her the greater part of the time.

But Barbara asked no more questions. So far no trouble had come from Eugenia's kindness. Perhaps this "Louise" was a person of no especial importance, whom the German authorities would not take the trouble to seek.

Of the person behind the locked door, nothing more had been seen or heard. Only Barbara had never been allowed to go into that particular room.

None of these things were troubling her this afternoon. Possibly she might try and talk them over with Eugenia later, although she really did not expect to. But she meant to stay all night and Eugenia had promised to spend an hour or so before bedtime alone with her.

It was a marvelous August night with the most perfect moon of the year.

The day had been hot, but the coolness came, as it nearly always does, toward evening. Nevertheless, Eugenia and Barbara decided to leave the house for a short walk. There was little chance for privacy indoors, as every room was now occupied and Eugenia had been compelled to take Nicolete in with her.

So at about nine o'clock, when most of the members of the household had retired, Eugenia and her guest started out. Eugenia wore a dark red sweater and cap and Barbara white ones, which she kept in the country for the purpose.

Neither girl intended to go far from home. Eugenia's house was in a comparatively deserted part of the countryside. There were no other places near. But for that very reason in case of difficulty there would be no one to offer aid.

To the left of Eugenia's was a big, uncultivated field. On the other side was the woods with the path which connected with her yard. The children often played in the woods near by, but in taking a walk persons were compelled to follow the traveled path. If one wandered away for any distance there was danger of getting lost. Not that the woods were particularly thick, but because they had been neglected and underbrush had grown up between the trees.

Therefore, as soon as the two girls walked the length of their yard they turned into the usual path. The woods were in reality only another portion of the abandoned estate. The moonlight was so bright that the path looked like a strip of white ribbon ahead. Then, though the foliage of the trees made beautiful, dense shadows, one could see distinctly in between them.

CHAPTER XII
The Ghost

The girls had been talking over certain details in connection with the management of Eugenia's establishment. She found it extremely difficult to buy provisions. But neither one of them was giving thought to what she said.

It was Eugenia, however, who offered the interruption.

"Please let's don't talk about things that are of no importance, Bab, when I see you so seldom," she protested. "Tell me, please, about Dick Thornton and Mildred and Nona. Dick and Nona were out here a few moments the other day, but I had no chance to have any conversation with them. I thought they both looked extraordinarily well to be working so hard. I never believed Nona as strong as you, Barbara, so why do you seem so used up? Is your work at the hospital more difficult than hers?"

"Certainly not," the other girl answered. "Really, Eugenia, I don't think it kind of you, or of other people, to keep on telling me I don't look well. I have assured you a dozen times I am all right. If you continue suggesting the other thing I shall probably fall ill. But Nona and Dick do seem well and cheerful, and so is Mildred for that matter. I think it is because they are all very happy over something. No one has spoken of it to me so I am only guessing. But it is true, isn't it, Eugenia, that if one is happy oneself, it is not hard to bear the sufferings of other people? Yet it seems to me that Belgium is scarcely the place to make one cheerful."

Instead of replying Eugenia laughed. The cynicism in Barbara's tone was so unlike her. Yet one could realize that she did not mean to be disagreeable. Really she was confused and needed information.

"Oh, I suppose one's own happiness is of chief importance," Eugenia finally returned. "It isn't human to expect people to be utterly wretched over others' sorrows. One can be sympathetic, of course, and depressed now and then, but that is about all."

Then they walked on a few yards in silence before the older girl added:

"Are you speaking of the same thing, Bab, that we discussed one night in the moonlight a good many weeks ago? I believe it was the first evening after Dick Thornton arrived in Brussels? Because if you are, I still don't agree with you. Of course, I have been separated from the rest of you most of the time lately, yet I don't think I am mistaken. What makes you believe as you do, Barbara?"

The older girl put this question in as careless a tone as possible. Then, although she and her companion were walking arm in arm, she did not glance toward her. She did not even try to get an impression of her expression in the moonlight.

Barbara shrugged her shoulders. "There are many signs, Eugenia, and they cannot always be defined. But I don't think *you* would ever see or understand them."

The slighting emphasis upon the pronoun was unmistakable; nevertheless, Eugenia only smiled. Once Barbara's point of view might have hurt her, but tonight she was not thinking of herself. She had something else upon her mind, but was uncertain whether it would be wise to discuss the subject, or leave it still in darkness.

"Well, perhaps you are right, Barbara," she admitted. "I had a note from Nona yesterday, but she made no reference to Dick. She wanted me to ask you a question for her, which perhaps neither of us has the right to ask. I don't know, it has worried me a good deal——"

She stopped because Barbara had turned in the path and was facing her half belligerently and half affectionately.

"Don't be a goose, Eugenia, ask me anything you like. Certainly I have bored you enough recently with my bad tempers and complaints to have you say whatever you wish to me. It's funny, Eugenia, but when we started for Europe I was sure I was going to like you less than any one of the girls. Now you are the only one I care very much about."

With this Barbara laughed, pretending that she was not altogether in earnest. But there was no humor in her laughter.

Eugenia received her information gravely.

"That may be good of you, dear, but I don't believe you," she returned. "Still I am glad you made the remark just at this minute. It helps me with what I wish to say to you. Nona wanted me to find out what it was that had changed your feeling for her. She says she has done her best to discover for herself and has asked you to tell her, but without success. She seems much distressed and is anxious to make amends if she has injured you."

The older girl had to cease talking because Barbara had pulled away and was walking on ahead without pretending to answer.

She was being rude and was aware of it. But it was better to be rude than to have any human being discover how crimson her face had become and how her lips were trembling. Eugenia's question had taken her so by surprise. Several weeks before she had gone through much the same kind of conversation with Nona and Mildred. But the subject had never been mentioned again and she hoped was happily over. It was too stupid to have Nona go on dwelling upon the matter in this way and utterly pointless. She had told her that she had nothing in the world against her. Surely one had the right to one's likes and dislikes!

Quietly Eugenia continued after her guest. She made no effort to stop her, although she realized that they were walking farther than they had intended.

Finally Barbara must have appreciated the fact, because she stopped and turned around.

"Let's go back home, I am dead tired," she murmured.

Of course Eugenia complied, and they continued in single file on the return journey.

Walking alone, Barbara once or twice thought that she heard some one tramping about in the underbrush not far away. But although she glanced over in that direction she saw no one.

After five minutes more of silence Barbara caught up with Eugenia, who was in the lead on the way home.

"Can we stop a minute somewhere, Gene, before we get back to the house? I have something I want to tell you. I believe I'll feel relieved once I have made a plain statement of a fact to myself as well as to you. And it will be easier to say it out here in the moonlight than in the light of day."

This time it was the older girl who hesitated.

"You said you were tired, Bab, and it is getting late. Besides, I am not sure it is wise for us to be so far from the house alone." She turned her head uneasily toward the left side of the woods. It was on the same side that Barbara had believed she heard a noise. But at present she was paying no attention.

"Please do as I ask you; a few minutes more cannot make any difference."

Then, just as they had two months before, the girls found a fallen tree and seated themselves on the trunk. But Barbara turned around so that she could look directly at her companion. A shaft of light shone straight across her face. Eugenia could see that the characteristic little frown was there as well as the slight wrinkling of the short, straight nose. Also that Barbara's eyes were serious, although the expression of her mouth was partly humorous. She looked very young and charming. Perhaps she was not so beautiful as many other girls. Yet she had a kind of mocking grace, an evanescent, will o' the wisp quality that was more fascinating than ordinary beauty. Then beside this, she was so thoroughly human.

"Yes, I have a grievance against Nona, a perfectly dreadful one. When I told her I didn't have, I just lied," she began directly. "Fact of the matter is, I can't forgive Nona for being more attractive than I am. I can't tell her this to her face though, can I, Eugenia? Nor can I see exactly how I can let *you* tell her."

Barbara clasped her hands together. They felt very warm, although the evening was cool. But then her cheeks were even hotter. Nevertheless, a smile at herself, perhaps the best smile there is in the world, flickered around the corners of Barbara's mouth.

"I know perfectly well what you are thinking, Eugenia. Nona has not changed recently. If I cannot like her now because she is prettier and more charming than I am, then why did I like her at the beginning of our

acquaintance? She was both those things then. But the fact is, I didn't care then, because, because—Oh, why is it so hard to get it out, Gene? I don't see why girls need always be ashamed of caring for people who don't care for them? I didn't know at first how much Dick Thornton was going to be interested in Nona Davis, nor how much I cared for Dick. There, the worst is out and I am glad of it!"

Then Barbara dropped her chin into her hands and sat staring at the moon up over the top of the trees, waiting for her companion to answer. Eugenia remained silent.

"Are you disgusted with me, Gene?" the younger girl asked the next moment. "Goodness knows, I have been with myself, though I never confessed the truth to any one, not even to Barbara Meade, until this second. I haven't any right in the world to like Dick except as a friend. He has always been only ordinarily nice and polite to me. I really never thought of him seriously until after we left Paris. Then when I found out he was writing to Nona and never to me, I was terribly hurt. I had believed we were better friends than he and Nona. At first I didn't see why I should mind so much, then by degrees I suppose I began to find out. Anyhow, the only reason I have for not liking Nona at present is jealousy. It is about the ugliest fault there is, so I'm not very proud of myself. But as I intend to make a clean breast of the subject tonight and then never mention it again, you might as well hear the rest. I don't like Mildred so much as I used to, because she evidently prefers to have Nona for Dick's friend than to have me. And there are times when I'd like to pinch her."

It was so absurd of Barbara to end her confession with this anti-climax. Yet the older girl was not deceived. Because she endeavored to make fun of herself and of the situation, she was no less in earnest.

"Why don't you say something, Gene?" she pleaded the next instant. "What shall I do? Am I ever going to be sensible again?"

Perhaps it was because Eugenia had been devoting herself to caring for children for the past two months, or perhaps it was because she had so strongly the mother feeling. For at this moment she wanted to take Barbara in her arms. Really, there was not very much for her to say under the circumstances. Should she insist that Dick was not in love with Nona when

she knew absolutely nothing about it? This would, only make things harder for the other girl in the end. Barbara was not a foolish, sentimental person; she was usually clear-sighted, with sound common sense. Of course, she would stop caring for Dick Thornton after a time if he felt no affection for her. But how convince her of this at the present moment?

"I had been fearing something like this, Barbara," Eugenia said finally. "I don't mean in connection with Nona. I never dreamed of her entering into the situation. Dick is a splendid fellow, but after all he has only one arm. Besides, I don't think Judge Thornton is really wealthy. They spend a great deal of money. I know from all I have heard that Judge Thornton makes a great deal, but that Mrs. Thornton is very extravagant and very ambitious."

Barbara got up. "Let's go to bed, Gene dear. Of course, nothing you can say will make any difference. But I promise to turn over a new leaf. Away with all human weakness!"

Barbara started to wave her hand, but instead clutched at Eugenia's arm frantically.

"Great heavens, who was that, Gene?" she whispered. "I am sure I saw some one sliding along between the trees. He was crouched over as if he feared we might see him."

Eugenia took the younger girl's arm. "It was no one, my dear. But remember, this is a haunted house and a ghost is supposed to wander all over the estate. Keep hold of my hand and we'll run to the house. Perhaps we may get there before the ghost does."

CHAPTER XIII
An Arrest

"I want you to know that I understand who the ghost was last night, Eugenia," Barbara said unexpectedly next morning.

Eugenia was just about to leave her bedroom, Nicolete having gone downstairs half an hour before.

At these words the older girl turned and stood straight and severe with her shoulders braced against the wall as if for support.

"What do you mean?" she inquired slowly.

Barbara had not finished dressing. Indeed, she was in the undignified attitude of sitting on one side of the bed putting on her stockings. Nevertheless, she gazed at Eugenia squarely.

"I mean just what I said," she answered. "That is, of course, I don't know the name or the age or the identity of the man I saw by accident in the woods last night. But I realize that he must be the same person you have been concealing ever since you took this house. Naturally he must grow weary of the long confinement and be obliged to go outdoors now and then at night."

Eugenia had not replied, so Barbara went on thinking aloud.

"Or else some one may have been coming to the house with a message for the person in hiding. Of course, I don't know whether your refugee is a man or woman. But whoever he or she may be, goodness knows, I'll be grateful enough when the escape is over and this house left behind!"

Eugenia's face whitened at the younger girl's words. Nevertheless, she again turned as if she meant to leave the room without an answer.

Barbara was too quick for her.

She took hold of both her shoulders and pulled her gently around.

"I would rather you would say something, Gene. I have been doing all the talking ever since I arrived. One minute I can't decide whether I ought to try and find out who this person is you have in hiding, or what your reason is. Then I wonder if it is best I should leave you alone? But please, please don't run any risks. You know that if you are defying the German authorities and are found out, what your punishment may be. What could *I* possibly do to help you? I feel so powerless. I can't tell you how I have longed to confide my suspicion to Dick Thornton or the girls and ask their advice. But I have kept absolutely silent."

"Thank you," Eugenia said, and then waited another moment. "Sit down, please, Barbara," she added. "I suppose it is only fair that I offer you some explanation. You have been so good."

Barbara did as she was requested. But Eugenia continued to stand. Her level, dark brows were drawn close together and her face was pale. Otherwise she looked entirely self-possessed, sure of herself and her position.

"I am not going to tell you that I have any one in hiding here, Barbara. If questions are ever asked of you, you are to know absolutely nothing. But I want you to understand that I appreciate perfectly the danger of what I have undertaken and have done it with my eyes open. If I am punished, well, at least I have always faced the possibility. But after today, dear, if things go as we hope, you need no longer worry over me. So far I feel pretty sure the Germans in command of this part of the country have not suspected our house in the woods of being anything more than a shelter for defenseless Belgian children. And really that has been my chief motive in all that I have done."

Barbara sighed. "God keep us through the day," she murmured, quoting a childish prayer.

Then Eugenia went downstairs to her work and a short time later the younger girl followed her.

Barbara was to remain until after lunch. But at her friend's request she spent most of the time in the yard with the children and Monsieur Bebé. Whatever

went on inside the house neither she nor any of the others were to be allowed to know.

As a special pleasure the children were to be permitted to eat their luncheon under an old tree in the one-time garden. This garden now held no flowers except two or three old rosebushes and overgrown shrubs.

The heat of yesterday had returned and with it even more sultriness. There were heavy clouds overhead, but no immediate sign of rain. It was one of those days that are always peculiarly hard to endure. The air was heavy and languid with a kind of brooding stillness that comes before the storm.

The nerves of everybody seemed to be on edge. Monsieur Bebé had lost his courage of yesterday and sat silent in his chair with his head resting in his hand. Was he dreaming of Provence before France was driven into war? Or was he hearing again the cracking of rifles, the booming of cannon, all the noises of the past year of life in a trench?

Several times Barbara did her best to distract his attention, but the French boy could do nothing more than try to be polite. It was evident that he hardly heard what she said to him. Nicolete was too engaged with her duties in the house to offer companionship. Nevertheless, she came back and forth into the yard. Now and then she would stop for a moment to speak to Monsieur Reney, who was Monsieur Bebé only to Barbara, who had so named him.

Nicolete was busy in arranging the outdoor luncheon for the children. For she it was who brought out the dishes and the chairs. Only once did she have any assistance and then the maid from the kitchen helped her with the luncheon table. Neither Eugenia nor the woman whom they called "Louise" was seen all morning.

So to Barbara fell the entire task of looking after the children. Perhaps it was the weather, perhaps they too were vaguely conscious that something unusual was going on about them, for they were extremely difficult.

Not once, but half a dozen times, each child insisted upon going into the house to search for Eugenia. She could not be busy for so long a time that she could not come out to them, they protested. This had never happened before.

Jan and Bibo were particularly sulky, nevertheless Barbara continued firm. Jan had been made her especial charge. Whatever happened he must be kept away from all knowledge of what was transpiring in the big house only a few yards off.

This world is ever a double mask with the face of tragedy painted upon one side and of comedy upon the other.

So often Barbara thought of this during the long hours of the morning.

Sometimes she was whirling about with the children in a ring, singing at the top of her voice to keep their attention engaged. Yet at the same moment her thoughts were all concentrated upon what was going on in the house with Eugenia. Whom had she in hiding all these weeks, risking her own liberty for his or her safety? And how was it possible that any human being could escape from Belgium whom the Germans wished to detain?

Yet not a carriage nor a human being approached the house from the front. Of this Barbara was absolutely certain. Always when it was possible she had kept a watchful lookout. Besides, there was Jan who had appointed himself sentinel.

The boy could not consciously have been expecting disaster. Not a human being had given him a hint of what was to take place. Yet he simply refused to play when the other children invited him.

When Barbara explained that Eugenia insisted he remain out of the house, he made no effort toward disobedience. He merely took up a position as far away as possible, but one where he could still see the house and at the same time keep a lookout ahead. For his quiet gray eyes would study the landscape beyond him sometimes for five minutes, then he would turn his head and gaze toward the house. Satisfied that he could discover nothing wrong there, he would again begin his former scrutiny.

He was an interesting figure; Barbara studied him whenever she had a chance. Here was a child whom the war had not so far injured physically. Although ill some weeks before he had since recovered. Yet he would bear the scars that the war had made upon his spirit so long as he should live. Bibo's lameness was as nothing to this boy's hurt. There was a look of abnormal gravity in his eyes, of an understanding of sorrows that a child of

ten should know nothing of. He was fearful and frightened and yet there was something indomitable in the child's watching.

He recalled the gallant army of children crusaders who, led by Stephen of France, went forth to wrest Jerusalem from the infidels. So their little sentinels must have waited wide-eyed and courageous, yet sick with dread, for the ravenous hosts to overpower them.

Another possibility worried Barbara and the children all morning. There was a prospect that rain might come and so spoil their luncheon party. Suppose they should be compelled to scamper for shelter just at the critical moment in Eugenia's plans?

The rain did not come. It must have been just a little after twelve o'clock when Eugenia finally walked down the front steps into the yard. She did not look toward Barbara, but her appearance was enough. Whatever she had wished to accomplish was now over.

Although at the moment she was engaged in learning a new Belgian game, Barbara had to suggest that she be allowed to sit down for a time. Eugenia might be able to look as calm as an inland lake, but she felt uncomfortably agitated.

First Eugenia spoke to Monsieur Bebé. Then she walked down to where Jan was standing. She said nothing to the boy, but put her arm on his shoulder. Afterwards they walked back together toward the other children. But Jan's expression had entirely changed. He was smiling now and his cheeks were happily flushed, yet he kept his hand tightly clutched in his friend's.

Soon after Nicolete came out of the house with a great tray of sandwiches. There was real ham between some of them and peanut butter between the others. Moreover, there was an enormous dish of baked potatoes and another of beans. For some reason the children did not understand, for it was neither Sunday nor a saint's day, they were to have a feast.

The table, which had been easy enough to arrange, since it was only a couple of boards laid upon carpenter's horses, was set in the middle of the garden, partly shaded by an old elm tree. The garden was just a few yards to the left of the house and in plain view of any one approaching.

Naturally Eugenia took her place at the head of the table, with Nicolete at the other end. Barbara was on Eugenia's right, with her eyes on the scene ahead. She could see the edge of the woods with the path that connected the house with the outside world. Jan was next her with the same outlook upon the surroundings.

It was Jan who saw the two German officers approaching with a guard of eight soldiers behind them a few moments later.

The boy had just lifted a sandwich to his lips when something in his rigid attitude first attracted Barbara's attention. She then let her knife drop onto the table.

The noise startled Eugenia, for she too looked up. Instantly Barbara explained what was happening.

"Don't stir and please don't appear to be frightened before the children," Eugenia ordered. "I must go and meet the officers, but I'll wait until they are nearer."

So the German soldiers had a clear vision of Eugenia and the children as they approached. The rough board table had no cover, but in the center was a bunch of wild flowers that the children had gathered in the neglected fields.

In order to keep them from seeing too soon what must inevitably happen, Eugenia started the singing of a Belgian translation of the Russian "Prayer for Peace."

It was perhaps the song that came most from her heart at the moment, although she and her little companions had been trying to learn it for several weeks past.

"God the All Righteous One! Man hath defied Thee,
Yet to eternity sure standeth Thy word;
Falsehood and wrong shall not tarry beside Thee,
Give to us peace in our time, O Lord!"

Then when the German officers were within a few yards of her, Eugenia got up and walked quietly forward. She did not go alone though, because Jan held on to her skirts so tightly that there was no possibility of tearing him loose.

"Will you wait a moment, please, until the children can be taken to another part of the yard?" Eugenia asked quietly. "Some of them are very young and will only be terrified and confused by our conversation. I think most of them are afraid of soldiers."

There was no reproach in the girl's tone as she said this. But the sting was inevitably there.

However, the older of the two officers bowed his head and Nicolete led the reluctant children away.

By this time Barbara had placed herself at one side her friend next to little Jan. And poor Monsieur Bebé, hearing the voices, had crept blindly forward to within a few feet of the little company.

In the meantime the soldiers had divided: two of them stood before the front door and two had retired to the rear of the house. The other four guarded either side.

"You are under arrest, Fraulein," the German officer began. He was stern, but rigidly polite.

"Very well," Eugenia answered. "In five minutes I can be ready to go with you. But tell me, please, of what I am accused."

"You are accused of harboring a Belgian spy, a Colonel Carton, who got back through the lines, disguised as a German soldier and into his wife's home in Brussels. His effort was to obtain certain papers and information

and then return to King Albert and the British Allies. We have reason to believe Colonel Carton is still in your house." The officer at this instant drew a pair of handcuffs from his pocket.

Naturally Eugenia flinched, yet she held out her hands.

"Your intention is to search my house. You will, of course, do what you wish. But remember that I am an American citizen and under the protection of the United States flag."

Then one of the officers remained in the yard while the other led his soldiers into the house.

Ten, fifteen minutes passed. Eugenia talked quietly to Barbara. She begged her to ask permission of the hospital authorities to allow her to stay with the children. She told her where she might obtain the money for keeping up their expenses. Some time before she had written a letter giving Barbara her power of attorney. Almost every detail had been arranged.

Of course, Eugenia was frightened. She was not unlike other people, only that she had a stronger will and sometimes a finer determination.

Finally the German officer and his soldiers returned.

"We can find no trace of Colonel Carton or his wife," the younger officer reported. "However, a servant from their household in Brussels is here and I have reason to believe the two children of Madame and Colonel Carton."

Still Jan, who had never let go his hold on Eugenia, did not flinch. Not once did he even glance up toward one of the German soldiers, nor give a sign that might betray him or his protector.

"I am sorry, but you must go with us until the circumstances can be more thoroughly investigated," the older officer commanded.

A short time afterwards Eugenia went quietly away. One of the soldiers carried her suitcase. Since she marched between them and showed no intention of giving trouble, the officer had taken off the handcuffs. Evidently he meant to be as courteous as possible under the circumstances. Moreover, Eugenia's dignity was impressive.

All through the interview Barbara had felt her knees trembling so beneath her that she felt unable to stand. Her hands were like ice and her cheeks on fire; moreover, there was a lump in her throat which made her totally unable to speak.

Nevertheless, she did speak whenever a question was asked of her, nor did she shed a tear until Eugenia had gone.

It was curious, but no one broke down, not even Jan. He merely kept his hold on Eugenia's skirt until she started to leave.

Then Eugenia herself unloosed his hands. He had been on his knees before and he made no effort to get up afterwards.

Finally, when Barbara lifted the boy in her arms she found it was because he was too weak to stand.

CHAPTER XIV
A Month Later

Dick Thornton had taken lodgings in an old house in Brussels in a once fashionable quarter of the city. He had a big reception room and a small room adjoining. Recently Nona and Mildred had been coming in to have tea with him on their afternoons of leisure. They even dropped in occasionally in their daily walks. For in order to keep their health and spirits each Red Cross nurse, following the familiar rule, was given two hours off duty every afternoon.

But Barbara Meade had never seen the quarters where Dick lived. Always she had pleaded some kind of an excuse in answer to his invitations, until finally he had proffered them no more. Then for the past month she had been taking Eugenia's place in her house in the woods.

But this afternoon Barbara had made an appointment to meet Nona and Mildred at Dick's at four o'clock.

Half an hour before the time, Dick came into the house with his arms full of flowers which he had purchased from a little old woman at the corner. She had become a great friend of his, for the flower business was a poor one in a city where people had no money even for food. So today Dick had purchased bunches of wall flowers and others of columbine and larkspur. For the flowers grew in the old woman's own garden within a sheltered suburb of Brussels. She must have grown them and sold them in order that she might still continue to sit in the same place. For so far as one could know she had no other reason for her industry. She appeared to be entirely alone and friendless.

Dick's sitting room was enormous, yet almost empty. The house had been deserted by its owners early in the war. They had then removed most of their belongings to London for safe keeping, soon after hostilities broke out.

But Dick opened wide a pair of French windows until the atmosphere of the room had grown cool and sweet. He then arranged his own flowers and set

out his own tea table in a somewhat clumsy fashion, drawing four chairs conveniently near. They were the only four chairs in the room and very different in character. Two of them were enormous armchairs upholstered in Brussels tapestry, the other were two small wooden ones which had probably served for the servant's dining room.

But Dick was fairly well satisfied with the appearance of things, since empty grandeur is much more satisfying than tawdry quantity.

Afterwards Dick disappeared to make an afternoon toilet.

It had been such ages since he had worn anything but the most workaday clothes. Now and then when he came in tired at night and discouraged with life from the sight of so much unnecessary sorrow, he used to slip into a smoking jacket for an hour or so. Usually several American fellows dropped in later, young doctors or other men assisting with the Belgian relief work.

But today Dick felt the occasion to be a more important one.

Barbara was coming on an errand of grave importance. Yet one might as well meet the situation as cheerfully as possible. Nothing was ever to be gained by unnecessary gloom.

It still remained a task for Dick to dress himself with one of his arms almost useless. At first it had been impossible and he had employed a man to help him. But men were needed for more strenuous labors these days than being another fellow's valet. So he had come to taking care of himself in a somewhat awkward fashion. The collar was his supreme difficulty, just as it frequently is with a man with two perfectly good arms.

Today, of course, because Dick was in a hurry, his collar behaved in a worse manner than usual. The collar button had to be searched for under the bed for nearly five minutes, and then it did not seem to fit the button-hole of the shirt.

Finally Dick sat down and began to smoke in an effort to soothe his nerves. Mildred had promised to come along ahead of time to do whatever was needed. As there was nothing more, except to adjust his tiresome neckwear, he might as well wait in peace.

But in the meantime Dick read over the note from Barbara in which she asked that the four of them might meet at his apartment. It was the one place where it was possible that their conversation be absolutely private. And what they had to discuss was a matter for gravest secrecy.

Although Dick had previously arranged his hair with much care, while reading the note he thrust his hand through it until his locks rose in brown, Byronic confusion.

So when the first knock came at his sitting room door, convinced of his sister's arrival, Dick strode to it, dangling his collar in his hand.

His appearance was not strictly conventional.

The girl at the door looked a little startled, then smiled and walked into the room without invitation.

"I suppose I am first. I didn't mean to be," she explained. "But Dr. Mason came out to see one of the children and brought me back to town in the hospital motor car. So I got here sooner than I expected."

"I am sorry. I thought you were Mildred. I mean, I hoped you were Mildred." Dick laughed. "Sounds polite, doesn't it, what I am trying to say? But the fact is, if you'll just take off your hat or your wrap, or your gloves, why, I'll disappear for half a minute and come back with a collar on."

Barbara nodded and her reluctant host disappeared.

She was glad of a few moments to look around. It was almost homelike here in Dick's quarters, and not since leaving the little "Farmhouse with the Blue Front Door" had she enjoyed the sensation of home.

She certainly did not enjoy it at Eugenia's big house, although she was now in full charge of the establishment. For there was always the sense of Eugenia's loss and of the privations which she was enduring.

Barbara did throw her hat to one side and her coat and gloves. The freedom was pleasanter. Then, since small persons have a penchant for large chairs and large persons for small ones, Barbara seated herself in the most imposing chair in the room.

Not thinking of where she was, nor of what she was doing, she slipped one small foot under her, leaned her head against the upholstery and gazed critically around.

They were going to have tea and she was glad of it. Then she loved the presence of so many simple outdoor flowers. Probably they had been purchased for Nona's delectation, yet one could enjoy them just the same.

Besides, Barbara was by this time convinced that she had entirely recovered from any jealousy where Nona and Dick were concerned. She had seen them very seldom in the past month. But this was not because she had any more feeling in regard to the situation. It was merely because she had more important matters to engage her attention. Her talk with Eugenia seemed to have cleared the emotional situation so far as she was concerned. Now her interest in Dick and Nona was purely impersonal and friendly.

Yet Barbara got up and strolled over to the tall French mantel. Yes, there was a picture of Nona on it. She had not been mistaken. Certainly Nona took an extremely pretty picture. Her features were so regular and delicate. It was rather different if one chanced to be afflicted with a retroussé nose.

Still studying Nona's photograph, Barbara heard a slight noise behind her.

There was Dick with his collar yet dangling from his hand.

"I say, which would you prefer, to talk to a man without a collar or to help him put one on? I am not going to lose all the chance I may have for seeing you in struggling with this dog-taked thing."

The girl looked demure. Then she indicated that Dick might seat himself upon the lowest stool. The next moment he was entirely ship-shape, as Barbara had also assisted in adjusting a new dark-red tie. It was of a flowing character, because Dick wore the same black velvet coat in which he had appeared before Barbara in New York City some eighteen months before. The coat was therefore not new. But Dick may have had a suspicion that it was becoming, although men are not supposed to be interested in any such trivial concerns.

However, Barbara was aware of the becomingness and was sincerely glad to discover how well her former friend looked. Certainly he had taken his

share of the war's misfortunes in a courageous spirit. Once she had not believed him capable of any ideal save a social one.

Barbara had returned to her tall chair and Dick sat across from her on one of the wooden ones. The tea service stood between them, but of course they were waiting for the coming of the other two girls.

Although she had wished for her tea, Barbara did not feel impatient over the delay at present. She was trying to make up her mind whether it would be wise to tell Dick how glad she was of his cheerfulness before she began to speak of her own mission. For then there would be little opportunity for cheerfulness unless one of the others had better news to report than she had.

So instead of beginning a conversation Barbara sat in entire quiet, although gazing at her companion in an extremely friendly fashion.

In the pause Dick Thornton suddenly thrust out his right hand and placed it lightly over Barbara's hand, which chanced to be carelessly lying on the table.

"I have something I'd like to tell you, Barbara, before Nona and Mildred get here," he began. "It is a secret so far and perhaps I have no right to be so happy until things are settled. But I've every right——"

The moment had come! The news that Dick had to tell her she had been expecting. Yet she had believed the announcement would first be made by Nona. It was kind of Dick to remember their former friendliness and to wish her to share his happiness so soon.

But at this instant Mildred and Nona, without waiting to knock, opened the sitting room door and Dick's confession was never made.

CHAPTER XV
Powerless

"But it is too dreadful for us to be able to do *nothing*," Barbara commented. She looked dispirited and blinked resolutely at a small pocket handkerchief which lay folded in her lap.

However, she had made up her mind not to cry, no matter what happened. After all, she was a woman and not a child, and Eugenia would consider tears a most ineffective method of assistance.

She had come to Dick's apartment with every idea of being brave and had started off in that spirit. Then Dick's interrupted confession had been a trifle upsetting. Moreover, she had hoped that Dick or one of the girls would have good news to tell about Eugenia, or at least be able to make a comforting suggestion.

While she was thinking this, Nona Davis got up and began walking up and down the length of the room.

"The situation is abominable!" she exclaimed. "To think of a splendid person like Eugenia, who is so needed, shut up in a German prison! Besides, she is an American girl! It simply makes my blood boil. I wish for a short time I were a man."

Nona's cheeks were a deep rose and her golden brown eyes were almost black from emotion.

Barbara thought she looked charming. But Dick smiled upon the excited girl rather condescendingly.

"Do come and sit down, please, Nona. I know it is your southern blood that makes you long to fight. But this isn't the time for it. After all, I am a man and I haven't been able to rescue Eugenia. Of course, you would be a more effective man than I can ever hope to be. But today let us try to face the situation quietly. It is the only way we can hope to accomplish anything."

In order to take the edge off his words Dick smiled. Also he thrust a chair nearer his guest. Barbara thought the other girl sat down somewhat meekly. Never could she have taken a snubbing so gracefully. But then there was no disputing that Nona had the sweeter disposition.

Then Dick reseated himself by the tea table. After taking several papers out of his pocket he again looked over toward Barbara.

"I wish you would repeat to me, word for word, as nearly as you can, just what statement Eugenia made to you when you were allowed to see her in prison," he demanded.

His matter-of-fact tone and present cold manner entirely drove away Barbara's weak leaning toward tears.

"It was some time ago, but I'll try and repeat what Gene said exactly as possible. She said we were not to be angry or embittered over her imprisonment, because she had defied the German authorities. She declared they had a perfect right to arrest her. For she *had* been hiding a Belgian soldier who would have been shot as a spy if he had been discovered. It was almost a miracle how he managed to escape. But they had been warned by a friend in Brussels a few days before, that their house was at last suspected. Actually Madame Carton and Colonel Carton both got away on the very day the German officers came for them. Eugenia would not tell how they managed their escape. She said that wasn't my business, nor any one else's."

As she repeated this speech, Barbara looked so surprisingly firm that Dick had to swallow a smile. Unconsciously Barbara was behaving like a phonograph record in reproducing the exact tones of the original speaker.

"But if Eugenia understood what she would have to face, whatever made her do such a mad thing? This Colonel Carton was absolutely nothing to her. When he returned to Brussels he took his own risk. It is natural that the Germans in command here in Belgium should be enraged. He probably carried back much valuable information to the Allies. Goodness only knows how he ever succeeded in getting here, much less getting away!" Dick protested, speaking as much to himself as his audience.

Then he pounded the table with his one good hand in his agitation.

"Eugenia was out of her senses. What excuse did she have for saving the man and his family? She is an American and is a guest of the country. She had no right to aid Germany's enemies. Besides, you girls always said that Eugenia was the one of you who insisted that you remain absolutely neutral."

With this final statement Dick gazed reproachfully from one to the other of his audience.

Every day since Eugenia's arrest he had gone about Brussels seeking assistance and advice. He had seen the American Minister, the American Consul and nearly every member of the Belgian Relief Committee. But in each case his answer had been the same. Whatever was possible would be done to effect Eugenia's release. But without doubt her behavior had placed her in a difficult position.

But Dick had not been alone in his pilgrimages. Mildred, Nona and Barbara had been equally energetic. There was no person in authority in Brussels possible to see whom they had not interviewed. But Eugenia was still in prison and liable to remain there. However, she had not yet appeared for trial before the German Military Court. Her friends were doing their best to have her set free before this time came. For once her sentence was declared, it would be more difficult to secure her pardon.

Eugenia insisted that there was nothing to do but plead guilty. And this might mean months or years of imprisonment!

The three girls became more unhappy under Dick's reasoning. It was so perfectly true that there seemed nothing for them to say.

Nevertheless, Barbara flushed indignantly. Dick always inspired her with a desire for argument. Moreover, when it came to a point of defending Eugenia, she would perish gladly in her cause.

"I realize that Eugenia's conduct does seem foolish. Perhaps it was worse than that; perhaps she was wicked to do as she did," Barbara added, no longer looking down at her handkerchief, but directly at Dick Thornton. Eugenia, she appreciated, would not require to be absolved before the other girls.

"Just the same, I think there was something beautiful and inspiring in Gene's act. She hasn't asked us to worry over her. She has declared all along that she was willing to take what was coming to her," Barbara murmured, falling into slang with entire good faith. "Her only defense is that both Colonel Carton and Jan were desperately ill when Madame Carton made the appeal to her. If she had not gone to the house in the woods to take care of them, they must have been found out. Then without a doubt Colonel Carton and perhaps Madame Carton would have been hung as spies."

An uncomfortable lump was beginning to form in Barbara's throat. For at the instant it seemed to her that Dick Thornton represented the whole tribunal of masculine wisdom and justice arrayed against a woman's sentiment.

How was she to make him see Eugenia's point of view?

In spite of her best efforts Barbara's eyes were filling with tears and her voice shaking.

"Gene says she never thought things out in detail, although she fully realized the risk she was running. All she decided was that Jan and his little sister should not be made orphans if she could help it. She says that ever since she put her foot in Belgium the cry of the children has been ringing in her ears. What had *they* to do with this war and its horrors? If she could aid them in the smallest possible way, this was her work and her mission. 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these little ones, ye have done it unto me,'" Barbara whispered, and then was unable to continue.

But Mildred had risen and was standing by her side as if she were a new witness for the defense.

"I have written father the whole story, everything Eugenia has done in connection with this entire case," Mildred explained quietly. "And I have asked him to go to Washington and see the Secretary of State and the President if he thinks necessary. As soon as my letter arrived he answered it immediately, promising to do what I asked. Then he told me to see Eugenia and if it were possible to present his regards to her and to tell her to be of good courage. Of course, he could not write all he meant, as his letter might be censored, but I think I understood father's point of view pretty well."

Because Mildred Thornton did not talk a great deal, what she said was usually respected. Even Dick looked somewhat subdued.

"What do you suppose father really did mean, then, Mill?" he queried. "I confess I am so troubled and so harassed over this business of Eugenia that I am of little account. I keep regretting that she ever got herself and all of us into such unnecessary sorrow."

Mildred went over and laid her hands on Dick's hair, which had again become rumpled through his agitation.

"I don't believe father thinks Eugenia's action was entirely unnecessary, Dick, even if we must all suffer with her," Mildred argued. "Perhaps Eugenia only did what any one of us would have done under the same circumstances, if we had possessed her courage and good sense. The Belgians were perfectly innocent of offense in this war. Colonel Carton was risking his life and his honor. If Eugenia could help him or his family——"

"Be quiet." It was Nona's voice that spoke, although under her breath. At the same instant she held up a warning finger.

There were persons passing in the hall outside their door. One could hear their footsteps distinctly.

Almost at once Nona got up and approached the tea table.

"Let us have tea, won't you, please, Dick?" she begged. "We are all tired and hungry and thirsty. Besides, we are discouraged." She said this even more softly, although the sounds in the hall had ceased. Doubtless the passersby were only other dwellers in the house.

Dick sighed with relief and gratitude.

"What a satisfying person you are, Nona! It would have been better, however, if you had made this suggestion half an hour ago." Then he turned again toward Mildred and Barbara.

"Please don't think I can't see that there was something fine and quixotic in Eugenia's conduct, even if I wish she had chosen differently," he added. "Truth is, I have taken the situation more seriously than ever today because I have had bad news."

Nona Davis had lifted the teapot in her hand to pour out the tea, but at these words she set it down hastily.

Mildred merely took a firmer hold on Barbara's shoulder.

"What is it, Dick?" she demanded.

This time Dick got up and floundered about impatiently.

"Oh, it may be nothing and perhaps I should not have spoken of it. But the truth is, Eugenia is ill. One of the physicians at the prison was considerate enough to let me know. He does not think the trouble serious and says Eugenia insists she will be all right in a few days. Just the same, Eugenia has been through a lot. I don't want to be a croaker, but there was the strain of the long nursing of Captain Castaigne and then this business. One of you girls must go to her as soon as I can get you permission, if I ever can get it. Which one of you shall it be?"

From the depth of her big chair Barbara answered in a somewhat weary but steadfast voice:

"There is no question; Eugenia and I have meant everything to each other lately, and——"

"There is a question, Barbara, and you must be sensible. In looking after Eugenia's house you are doing everything you have strength for. I am sure you can't weigh a hundred pounds these days! Ever since we came to Belgium, it seems to me you have been growing tinier. After a while you may blow away," Mildred declared.

Then she marched over and, removing the teapot from Nona's hand, began pouring out the tea in a quiet and comforting fashion.

"Of course, Eugenia is not well after a month of being in prison. Why should any one of us expect her to be?" she announced. "Here, Dick, please pass this cup to Barbara and your muffins. The poor child looks utterly fagged! We ought to have thought that she has come all the way in from the country and has probably been up since daylight. She is a very little woman to live in a shoe."

Gratefully and without further protest Barbara drank her tea. She was more tired than she had dreamed and glad to be taken care of for even a short a time. How happy she was to have gotten over her former antagonism toward her friends. What right had she to be jealous and miserable because a beautiful experience had come to Nona and Dick? They were both her good friends.

At this moment Dick was whispering something to Nona, while she smiled up toward him. There was no mistaking the expression in her eyes, Barbara felt convinced. Later on she would congratulate them, but not this afternoon; she was too tired.

Perhaps Nona became conscious of the other girl's gaze, for she drew away from her companion.

"By the way, Barbara," she exclaimed, "there is something I have wished to tell you for several days! Weeks ago when you told me you had discovered Lieutenant Hume a prisoner in Brussels, I wrote him a note. It must have taken ages for my letter to get to him. Anyhow, I received three or four lines from him the other day. I suppose it was all he was permitted to write. But he thanked me and said he was getting on pretty comfortably. Certainly I could not but admire his courage."

Dick Thornton frowned. "You don't mean, Nona, that you wrote a letter to Lieutenant Hume in prison without his asking you. I didn't suppose you knew him sufficiently well."

But before Barbara could confess that the suggestion had come from her, Mildred Thornton interposed.

"Don't be absurd, Dick. You are taking everything in a gloomy fashion this afternoon. I should have written Lieutenant Hume myself if Nona had not. He is in hard luck, when a single line from the outside world is cheering. We must go now. Please do your best to get me permission to visit Eugenia. In the meantime I shall see what I can do. Sorry we had to have such a dismal party tea. Hope for better news next time."

CHAPTER XVI
Louvain

Recently Nona Davis had begun to confess to herself that she might some day be able to like Dick Thornton more than an ordinary acquaintance.

Without doubt this idea had come to her gradually, for during their early acquaintance he had simply represented Mildred's brother and Barbara's especial friend. When she thought of him at all it had been chiefly in his relation to the other two girls.

Dick was good looking and agreeable, these were obvious facts. Moreover, he had shown splendid grit and courage in his work for the poor and wounded in the present war. However, it was not until after their holiday visit together in Paris that Nona had reason to believe Dick desired her intimate friendship.

She had already left Paris and was living at the little farmhouse in southern France when he wrote begging her to tell him the details of their life together which his sister, Mildred, might forget.

The request had struck Nona as surprising. Why had he not made the suggestion to Barbara Meade rather than to her? He and Barbara had quarreled now and then before the trip to Paris and while there, but in spite of this seemed to find each other's society more than ordinarily agreeable.

Moreover, Dick probably owed his life to Barbara. Had she not rescued him from the bursting shell near their base hospital, or Dick must have carried more than a useless arm as a record of his adventure.

Nevertheless, if Dick and Barbara had chosen for reasons of their own to be less intimate, Nona could scarcely ask questions. Neither did she see how she could refuse to write to Dick Thornton if he really wished it, since her letters were merely to keep him in closer touch with the four American Red Cross girls.

Dick wrote delightful letters and so did Nona. Besides, these were days when, in spite of its tragedies, life was brimming over with interests. The letters grew more frequent, more intimate, and finally Dick spoke of his coming to Belgium. But he proposed that his coming be kept a secret until the last moment, for there might be circumstances that would interfere.

Since his arrival Nona had been frequently in his society. The fact that Mildred was partly responsible for this, she did not realize. She only knew that Barbara had persistently refused to join them in leisure hours. Therefore she and Dick and Mildred were of necessity more often together; Eugenia was entirely out of the situation. The fact that Mildred purposely left her alone in her brother's society, Nona never considered. Whenever this had occurred, she simply regarded the circumstance as an accident.

But Nona naturally felt a closer bond between herself and Dick since her confession of her own problem. Moreover, she had taken his advice and sent a letter to her family lawyer in Charleston. In this letter she demanded to be told everything that was known or could be found out in connection with her mother's history. But although a number of weeks had passed her letter had remained unanswered.

Three days after the interview in regard to Eugenia in Dick's apartment, Nona received a hurried note. The note explained that Dick Thornton had been ordered to Louvain to make an especial investigation for the Belgian Relief Committee. He asked if Nona could manage to make the trip with him. They would start early the next morning and return the same day. If it were possible for Nona to be excused from her hospital work, he was particularly anxious to have her join him.

Ten minutes after the note arrived, Nona was busy making the necessary plans.

At the hospital there were no objections offered to her being given the day's holiday. For Nona explained that she was convinced that it would be a wonderfully interesting experience to visit the ruined city and University of Louvain.

More than the other girls she had enjoyed their journeys from place to place in Europe, when they were obliged to change their fields of work. Even

when these trips had not been taken under the pleasantest conditions her enthusiasm had been able to rise above the difficulties.

When the war was over Nona hoped before going home that it might be possible for her to travel over the continent. Now and then she and Mildred Thornton had even spoken of this as a possibility in an idle fashion. For with Nona such a discussion could be nothing but idle, as she had scarcely a dollar beyond what she was able to earn as a nurse.

At ten o'clock on the chosen day Dick called for her. As soon as she joined him in the hall of the hospital, Nona recognized that Dick had seldom looked so well. Besides, he seemed somehow more vigorous and happier.

In honor of the occasion he wore what appeared to be a new suit, although it had been purchased in London soon after his arrival a number of months before.

After her first sensation of admiration Nona suffered a tiny pang of envy. How satisfying it must be to have as much money as Dick and Mildred seemed to have! They were not extravagant and yet they never had to worry over small matters. More than this, it must be a great help through life to have so distinguished a father as Judge Thornton. Whenever his name was mentioned abroad people had heard of him as a great international lawyer. Sometimes Nona wondered why Mildred and Dick should care for her friendship. The distinguished members of her family had belonged to generations that were now dead.

But today, for many reasons, Nona would particularly have liked to wear a different costume. For assuredly Dick must be as tired of the one she had on as she was herself. It was the same black dress that she had bought in Paris last spring and been compelled to use for best ever since.

True, Nona had managed to run out the evening before to one of Brussels' millinery shops, where she purchased a small black turban. Before the coming of the German military hosts to Belgium, Brussels was regarded as the small sister of Paris in matters of fashion. Since then, of course, the city had but little heart for frivolity.

However, Nona felt fairly well satisfied with her purchase. Moreover, she was pleased to discern that Dick Thornton's eyes rested upon it with

immediate satisfaction. It is true that a man more often observes a woman's hat than any part of her costume.

In walking on the street you may make this discovery for yourself. A man or boy looks first at a girl's face, then if this pleases him he slowly studies her costume and figure. Frequently a woman or girl glances first at the toilette, and then if displeased never cares to look beyond for the personality.

However, Nona had but little reason for being dissatisfied with her own appearance. She was one of the few fortunate persons who have a grace and beauty of coloring that is not dependent upon clothes. Clothes help, of course, under all circumstances, yet she could manage to be beautiful in shabby ones. Moreover, the black dress was only slightly worn and her white crepe waist had been freshly washed and pressed.

Before she arrived at the Station du Nord with her companion, Nona had the good sense to cease to consider her apparel. For since Belgium was a land of mourning, poverty was the most fitting dress.

The land between Brussels and Louvain was once an agricultural district. Since Belgium had been conquered and possessed by the Germans, they had made every effort to resow and harvest many of the fields. But the neighborhood of Louvain was still a place of desolation.

As their train carried them farther along on their journey, Nona decided that she had never seen anything like the countryside in all her experience as a war nurse. In certain parts of France wide areas had been destroyed, but not far away one would often find other districts untouched by fire or sword.

Dick and Nona talked in a desultory fashion as they journeyed toward the famous old university town. One felt as if Louvain was already a city of the past. Within its suburbs there were many small ruined homes, looking as if a giant had ruthlessly pushed over whole rows of dolls' houses. For Louvain was formerly one of the lace-making centers of Belgium, and in these small houses dark-eyed women and girls once worked long hours at their trade.

Before their arrival Dick decided that he must first attend to his business in Louvain. Afterwards they would feel freer to prowl about and investigate

the ruins of the University. It would not be necessary to hurry then, as there would be no reason to return to Brussels until after dark.

Dick's pilgrimage to Louvain had been inspired by the desire to discover a family of Belgians supposedly starving in one of the city's wrecked homes. The father was known to have been killed at the sacking of Louvain. Yet in some amazing fashion the mother and children had continued to exist for nearly a year without money and almost without food. The American Relief Committee, learning their need, had despatched Dick to see what could be done for them.

Just what the character of the place he was to seek, nor the conditions surrounding it, the young man did not know. Therefore, he considered it wiser for Nona to wait for him. So he led her into the interior of the ancient Church of St. Pierre, where she was to remain until his return. The church had been only slightly injured by the burning of the city.

As a matter of fact, Nona was glad to be allowed to rest there peacefully for a time. Although she was an excellent nurse, she was not so successful in making friends with unfortunate people as the other three Red Cross girls. So she feared that Dick might consider her more of a drawback than a help to him in his work. The girl was frank enough to confess to herself that she wished to make a good impression.

An old church is ever a citadel of dreams. Yet Nona had not the faintest intention of letting her imagination wander into unbounded realms when she first found a seat in the semi-darkness.

Simply from curiosity she had gone into one of the chapels behind the high altar. Here she discovered five paintings, depicting the life and death of the blessed Margaret of Louvain, the patron saint of domestic servants.

At first Nona was simply amused and interested, for it had not occurred to her that domestic servants had a saint of their own.

Then without realizing it she fell to thinking of her own old home in Charleston, South Carolina, and of the southern "mammy," who had been more than her own mother to her.

It was strange that her lawyer in Charleston had not yet answered her letter. Perhaps she would ask Dick his opinion again. However, Nona felt a curious shrinking from this idea. For if Dick was beginning to feel interested in her, surely the mystery of her mother's history must influence him against her.

At the same instant the girl's cheeks grew hot with embarrassment. Then she deliberately struggled to discover a different train of thought. But for some reason, no matter along what road her thoughts set out, they had a curious fashion of including Dick before the end was reached. So at last Nona gave up and let her imagination have its will.

When he came back an hour after their usual luncheon time, Dick found her not in the least impatient. She insisted that she had enjoyed herself, and her face and manner gave proof of it.

But Dick was tired and not so cheerful as he had been earlier in the day. His work was over temporarily, but he had found a most depressing state of things among his poor people. Moreover, Dick was hungry, when a masculine person is always difficult.

They discovered a little restaurant existing in a half-hearted fashion near the University. After a leisurely meal, it must have been past three o'clock when finally the two friends made their way into the University grounds.

The buildings were not all entirely destroyed by the German bombardment, as the newspapers gave us to understand after the fall of Liege. Possibly many of them can be restored when the present war is over.

Up and down the Rue de Namur the young Americans wandered, first investigating the ruins of the handsome Gothic Halles. The Library is perhaps the most complete wreck, and it was one of the most valuable libraries in Europe. For it contained many priceless manuscripts gathered together by the old monks, who were once teachers in this most famous Catholic university in Europe.

The University of Louvain was founded in the fifteenth century by Pope Martin V, and only a little over a year ago sheltered eighteen hundred students.

But they have disappeared even as the bricks and mortar of the centuries have been brought to confusion.

Finally after nearly two hours of sightseeing Dick and Nona confessed to each other that they were too weary to feel any further interest in their surroundings. Moreover, they were obliged to rest before returning to the railroad station.

Nothing could be more romantic than the spot they chose.

With a half tumbled down wall for a background and a tall tree for a screen, a small green bench lingered serenely. It was as comfortable and undisturbed as though no destruction had raged about it.

With a sigh of relief Dick dropped down beside his companion.

"If you don't mind, I'd rather not speak for five entire minutes," he suggested. "Afterwards perhaps I may tell you something about which I have been thinking more or less all day. But I am not yet convinced that I ought to mention it to you, though with all my heart I wish to know what you think and feel upon the subject."

In reply Nona only nodded agreement.

Then she folded her hands in her lap and sat gazing quietly at the unique scene about them.

In a little while twilight would fall. The atmosphere was already a pale violet and over the massed ruins of the ancient buildings the sun was declining peacefully. Except for the girl and her companion the neighborhood was deserted, not a man, woman or child, not even a dog could be discovered in the nearby streets.

CHAPTER XVII
"*Sisters under the Skin*"

After a little while the silence between the girl and man grew self conscious. Both of them seemed to recognize this at the same moment, and Dick turned apologetically toward his companion.

"I am sorry to continue so stupid," he explained, "but I have been thinking something over for the nine hundred and ninety-ninth time."

In spite of the coolness of the October afternoon Dick now took off his hat and in a boyish fashion ran his fingers through his hair. Immediately the curly pompadour he so detested arose, while under his dark skin the color was rushing in warm waves.

"I say, Nona," he began in an awkward fashion, his charming manners entirely deserting him, "has it ever struck you that I have had something very much at heart for the past few months, something I have not been able to mention? It has seemed to me as if the whole world must know of it, although I have never spoken a word. Yet even Mildred has appeared totally blind. Of course there was a reason once why I should keep my dream to myself, but lately that reason no longer exists." Then Dick laughed unexpectedly.

"Here I am talking like a school-boy who does not know his lesson! I don't suppose you have the faintest idea of what I am trying to say? Wonder if you have ever guessed my secret, Nona?"

Dick had swung himself around on the bench so that he might be able to gaze more directly at his companion. But Nona Davis' head was for the instant in profile.

Just then she preferred not to catch Dick's glance. Her own cheeks were delicately flushed and indeed the world had acquired a new fragrance. Yet oddly Nona wished to hug her emotion to herself.

There is a moment when the spirit of romance appears to every girl in some lovely guise. Now Nona Davis felt that no moment and no scene could be more picturesque than her own.

Dick Thornton was ideally handsome; moreover, the fact that one of his arms was now useless only added to his value. For was not Dick a soldier of peace rather than of war, yet one who had made the same sacrifice? And he had given himself for a cause that was not his own.

"No, I have not guessed, Dick," Nona replied an instant later. "How could I? If you have a secret you have certainly not betrayed yourself. Besides, if I had been able to discover what you had in mind, I should not have allowed myself to know. No one has the right to interpret another person's thoughts."

Nona made this speech with entire innocence, but she was to recall the last phrase within a few moments.

"Well, I'll start off with a piece of news I am sure you will be pleased to hear," Dick began. "I wanted to tell Barbara first, but we were interrupted the other afternoon. It is only that I think I am to have better luck with this lame arm of mine than I deserve. When I was in Paris the surgeons told me to leave it alone, that I stood a chance of being able to use it later on. So I tried to forget the whole matter. Then one day several weeks ago without thinking I discovered that I could use my arm the least bit. Of course, it is by no means well, but each day the arm grows stronger——"

With this news Nona stretched out her hand toward her companion. But Dick did not see her, as he chanced to be gazing at his afflicted arm in the half tender, half apologetic fashion in which one surveys a backward child.

"The doctors I have seen since I made the discovery say my arm will be as good as new in another few months," Dick went on. "I have only to have it massaged daily and wait for the vigor to come back. So I may be able to amount to a little something in the world after all. Perhaps a man with a lot of brains may manage to get along with no arms, but I'm afraid *I* require the full amount."

By nature Nona Davis was inclined to be serious. Therefore she could never understand the fashion in which Barbara and Dick were able to jest over their deeper emotions.

Her yellow-brown eyes were serious now.

"I am sure *I* have never doubted your future for a moment, Dick. It sounds ridiculous to hear you make a speech like that. I am sure your father is a distinguished man, yet I feel sure you will be a greater one some day."

For half a moment Dick smiled upon his companion. "You are an optimist, Nona, but just the same I am tremendously grateful to you."

Then in a surprising fashion his gay spirits suddenly deserted him. For he frowned moodily toward the purple and rose colored sky on the far western side of the horizon.

The sun was by this time about to retire and the colors in the evening sky were merely the garments she had cast off in passing.

"I wish you could persuade Barbara Meade to share that idea of yours, Nona?" Dick continued a moment later. "If you could you would be doing me an immense service."

"Barbara?" Nona repeated her friend's name dully. She was so far away from any thought of her at the time that it was difficult to readjust her point of view. "What is it you wish me to persuade Barbara to believe?" she demanded the next instant. For in her surprise she had forgotten her own remark.

"Oh, that I am worthy of bearing my father's name and that there is a chance I may not turn out a hopeless good-for-nothing," Dick went on, with a scarcely concealed bitterness in his voice.

"Two years ago when I first met Barbara I suppose I was only a society fellow, but really I was not so bad as I painted myself. Fact is, I rather enjoyed arousing Mildred's little western friend in the early days. Well, I accomplished my purpose with a vengeance, for Barbara has never had an ounce of respect for me. Even if you and Mildred have never guessed how much I care for her, the fact has been plain enough to Barbara. What other reason could she have, except to spare me humiliation, for refusing to have anything to do with me since I came to Brussels? But you have understood the situation better than you confess, Nona. Be sure that I appreciate your kindness immensely."

Still Nona made no reply. However, as Dick had been holding his emotions in check for many weeks, he was glad now to have a chance to let them overflow.

"I appreciated that you understood when I first asked you to write me, after you left Paris," the young man continued. "Your letters meant so much to me, for they used to tell me so many things of Barbara and your life together in the little French farmhouse."

Interrupting himself, Dick glanced at his watch and then at his companion.

"You look tired, Nona, and I am sorry, but I expect we must hurry if we are to get to the station in time for the six o'clock train to Brussels. You have been wonderfully patient with me this afternoon and I hope not too bored. Perhaps I should have kept all this to myself, but at last it has overflowed. I shall never refer to the matter again and shall be grateful if you do not mention it."

Dick held out his right hand to help his companion arise.

But for another instant Nona did not stir. Neither did she glance upward. Her eyes had dropped to her lap and were evidently fastened upon her slender hands, which she held lightly clasped together.

Possibly she had become a shade paler, but not by a flicker of an eyelash did she betray that her house of cards had suddenly fallen.

The next moment she gave her hand to Dick and got up.

"I am not tired, so let us walk on quickly if you think best. I am going to be honest and tell you, Dick, that I have never dreamed you were seriously interested in Barbara until this hour. I knew you were friends at one time and that Barbara had done a beautiful thing for you. But I thought you had probably quarreled, or that you did not find each other so interesting as you had at first."

The girl was walking along swiftly as she talked.

Her delicate chin was lifted a little higher than usual and because of her pallor her lips showed a deeper crimson. She was a lovely height and

slender and graceful, but beyond everything else she had the air of perfect breeding.

Dick's own train of thought was diverted for a moment by a glance at her.

"After all, it is not an impossibility, Nona Davis' mother may turn out a foreign princess," he thought, and then smiled. For Dick was a typical American man and to him a mystery in one's family was ridiculous when it was not unpleasant.

On the train returning to Brussels neither he nor his companion cared to talk a great deal. Indeed, Nona frankly explained that there was something she wished to think about, and if Dick did not mind, would he please leave her alone. So he was satisfied to continue sympathetically silent.

He had unloosed certain thoughts of his own which were not so easy to chain up again.

However, they still had a half hour before their arrival in Brussels when Nona unexpectedly returned to their former subject of conversation.

"You asked me never to refer to your confession, Dick, and I won't again after today. But first I must tell you something. Then if you'll forgive me I want to offer you a piece of advice. I know it is an ungrateful present, but you'll listen, won't you?" Nona pleaded.

Dick's brown eyes were very friendly. "I'll listen to whatever you wish to tell me forever and ever," he insisted. "For there was never quite so kind an audience as you have been to me!"

The girl was glad of the flickering lights in the railroad carriage, when she spoke again.

"It is only that I have been thinking of you and Barbara ever since we left Louvain," she added. "I told you I was surprised at the news. But now I think it was stupid of me. What I want is to ask you to tell Barbara what you have confided to me this afternoon. I understand that when you were uncertain about your arm, you may have felt that a drawback. Now you have every right to believe in your recovery and"—Nona hesitated and smiled directly into Dick's somber brown eyes—"oh, well, it is only fair

that Barbara be allowed the same information that I have received under the circumstances!"

At this moment it was Dick who would not be humorous.

"I suppose you think I ought to give Barbara the satisfaction of telling me what she really thinks of me. But I am afraid I am not willing to amuse her to that extent."

Nona shook her head. "That wasn't worthy of you, Dick; I know you did not mean it. I am not going to give up. I want you to promise me that whenever the chance comes you will let Barbara have some idea of your feeling for her."

This time Nona held both her hands tight together.

"I can't explain to you, Dick, so please don't ask me why," she continued. "But I have been thinking that there may be another reason why Barbara has seemed less friendly with you since your arrival in Brussels. Girls sometimes get strange ideas in their minds. But there we are coming into Brussels. Thank you for my day in Louvain, I shall not forget it!"

CHAPTER XVIII
Difficulties

Perhaps it was due to Nona Davis' advice, or perhaps to Dick Thornton's own judgment, that he decided to make his position clear to Barbara.

He had no thought of her returning his liking; nevertheless, a confession appeared the more manly and straightforward.

But beginning the next day's events moved ahead so swiftly that there was never a chance for Dick to carry out his intention.

By noon a message was sent him by his sister Mildred. She explained that soon after breakfast she had been summoned to the German prison for a consultation in regard to Eugenia Peabody. She found the prison officers both embarrassed and annoyed.

For the young American woman whom they had been compelled to arrest had become dangerously ill. They had not been prepared for such a contingency. She had been locked up in what had formerly served as an ordinary jail in Brussels and there were no accommodations for seriously ill persons.

They could not determine what should be done. It was extremely awkward to have their prison doctor declare the prisoner a victim of typhoid fever, and to have the physician sent from the American Relief Committee confirm his opinion.

Suppose this Miss Peabody should be so inconsiderate as to die? The fact might arouse international complications and would certainly precipitate unpleasant discussion.

The young woman had been kept a prisoner for something over a month without a trial, but even in this time important pressure had been exerted for her release.

Because she had been an American Red Cross nurse, naturally all Red Cross societies were interested. Moreover, she was said to be a member of an old and prominent New England family, who would make themselves heard in her behalf. Then as this Miss Peabody was herself wealthy and had been using her money for the benefit of the Belgian children, what might not be said in her defense? There was a chance that the German government would be accused of resenting her care of the Belgian children.

In order to show their good feeling, Mildred had been permitted to visit Eugenia. She found her friend in a small room like a cell. It was of stone with only one window, a stool and a cot bed.

But whatever Eugenia must have suffered for her breach of faith, she was now past being disturbed by mental unhappiness.

For an hour Mildred sat beside her friend trying to arouse her. But Eugenia gave no sign of recognition. She did not seem to be enduring pain, but was in a stupor from fever.

Mildred felt unhappy and helpless. There was but little chance of her friend's recovery if she remained without the right care. Moreover, the American Red Cross girls owed it to one another to keep together through good and evil fortunes.

"What would Eugenia have done for one of them under the same circumstances?" Mildred tried her best to decide. She implored the prison authorities to allow her to remain and care for her friend. But they refused. It was not that they were unwilling for their prisoner to be properly looked after. It was that there were no arrangements whereby it was practical for Mildred Thornton to continue at the prison. She could come each day and stay for a time with her friend. And this was, of course, a surprising concession.

So after Mildred returned to her own quarters she had sent a note of explanation to her brother.

Then began the most anxious week that the American Red Cross girls had endured since their arrival in Europe. Before now anxiety had harassed one or two of them at a time. Now they were all equally concerned.

Eugenia did not grow better. From day to day the report of her condition became worse. Mildred Thornton was the only one of the three girls ever allowed to enter Eugenia's room at the prison. However, Nona and Barbara hovered about the neighborhood like restless ghosts. Indeed, they now appeared as deeply attached to each other as in the early days of their acquaintance.

Nor was Dick Thornton much less anxious. He had always liked and admired Eugenia. Although he disapproved her action in regard to Colonel Carton, it was not possible wholly to object to it. One had to have a sneaking sense of appreciation for a girl or man who would risk so much for an entire stranger.

However, interest in Eugenia's condition was not confined to her few friends. In a little while her case became the most talked of in Brussels among the Americans and their acquaintances. Then the news of Eugenia's arrest and the reason for it appeared in the American daily papers together with the account of her critical illness. Afterwards these facts were copied in the newspapers of England, France and Russia. Eugenia became an international figure.

Now and then Barbara tried to smile, thinking how Eugenia would have resented her notoriety had she been aware of it. But the idea did not create much mirth. It was so far from amusing to picture one's friend at the point of death, shut up in a tiny room, with only such crude care as the prison physician and nurse could give her.

The situation was unendurable; nevertheless, like a great many other situations about which one says this *same* thing, it had to be endured.

The German officials in command of the city of Brussels assuredly grew weary of visits from white-faced American girls and their friends, all bent upon the same quest. Was it not possible that Eugenia be removed to a hospital or to her own home until she recovered?

The answer remained the same. Much as the situation was to be deplored, one could not surrender a prisoner because of ill health. Discipline must be enforced.

Then a day came when Mildred and Dick Thornton were granted an unexpected interview with the American Minister in Brussels. They had seen him several times before, but on this occasion it was the Minister who sent for them.

He had previously been kind and interested in Eugenia's case, but so far his good will had not availed in her behalf. He could only offer his good will, because it was not possible to demand the prisoner's liberation when she had frankly confessed her offense against the German administration.

Yet as soon as they were permitted to enter the study where the Minister was seated at his desk, Mildred Thornton had her first moment of hopefulness. For Mr. Whitlock had become her friend since this trouble began and his expression indicated good news.

"There was no use going into particulars," he declared, "but some days before he had received certain letters from Washington. It appeared that Judge Thornton had been to Washington in Eugenia's behalf, according to his daughter's request, where he must have interviewed persons of importance." Whatever took place the American Minister now announced that he had placed Judge Thornton's communications before the proper German officials. Whether they were influenced by these letters, or whether they concluded that there was more to be lost than gained by detaining their prisoner under the present conditions, it is impossible to say. The important fact was that Eugenia might at last be moved to her own house. There she was to be allowed to stay under guard until such time as she could safely leave the country. She would then be conducted to the border line of Holland and allowed to depart. But Eugenia Peabody was never again to set foot within a German country during the course of the present war. If she should enter it she would immediately become liable to arrest.

So in spite of the possible danger Eugenia was immediately removed to her own house in the woods, the house supposedly inhabited by a ghost.

But instead of ghosts it was now haunted by the other three Red Cross girls, all of whom insisted upon sharing the labor of caring for Eugenia and looking after her home.

Yet after all it was on Barbara Meade that the largest share of the burden fell. For the children had grown accustomed to her since their first friend's departure. Then by a freak of chance Eugenia seemed to wish Barbara near her the greater part of the time. She was not conscious, so her desire was only an eccentricity of illness. Nevertheless, Barbara naturally tried to be with her friend whenever it was humanly possible.

So it is easy to see why Dick Thornton found no opportunity to confide to Barbara the dream that lay so near his heart. He saw her now and then, of course, in his own frequent visits to the household, but seldom alone.

Occasionally, when for a moment he had a chance for a quiet word with her, Dick was not willing to intrude his own desires.

Barbara looked so worn and fragile these days. The roundness had gone from her cheeks as well as their color, her eyes and lips rarely smiled. It would only trouble her further to have him cast his burden upon her. For Barbara would, of course, be sorry to cause him unhappiness. So Dick decided to wait until serener times.

One afternoon, however, the opportunity for entrusting one of his secrets arrived.

For the past three days Eugenia had been growing continuously weaker. The crisis of her disease had passed and her fever was not so high. But her weakness had become a more dangerous symptom.

About four o'clock Dick drove out to the house in the woods with Dr. Mason, who was one of the physicians devoting himself to Eugenia's case.

He did not go indoors, but asked that one of the three American Red Cross girls be sent out to speak to him. It was a cold afternoon, yet the sun was shining and Dick felt that the fresh air would be of benefit. No matter which of the three girls was free to join him, they could walk up and down in the yard for a few minutes. The suspense of waiting for Dr. Mason's verdict would be less severe outdoors than shut up inside.

But although Dick walked up and down the front porch for quite ten minutes, no one appeared. Either Dr. Mason had forgotten to deliver his message or else the girls were too busy or too nervous to leave the house.

Dick finally grew weary of the veranda as a place for a promenade. A little later some one would be sure to come out to him, and in the meantime he would walk a short distance into the woods.

A few yards along the path the young man stumbled across Barbara.

She was wearing her gray blue nursing cape and was sitting upon a log. She looked so tiny and was huddled so close that Dick somehow thought of a little gray squirrel.

Barbara was too engrossed in her thoughts to hear him until he was almost upon her. Then Dick grew frightened, because instead of speaking she jumped to her feet and put up her hand to her throat as if she were choking.

It did not occur to Dick that she was terrified. He did not dream that she had run away from the house because she dared not wait to hear Dr. Mason's decision in regard to Eugenia. Now, of course, she thought him sent to her with a message.

And the worst of it was Dick did not say a word. He simply stared at her, mute and sorrowful, because gay little Bab had become such a pathetic figure on this November afternoon.

Dick's silence could mean but one thing to the girl.

She made a little fluttering sound, wavered, and the next moment Dick was holding her upright on her feet with both his arms.

At this same instant Barbara forgot both Eugenia and herself.

She had felt the world growing dark before her eyes a moment before. Now a miracle brought her back to her senses.

She drew herself away at once and stood upright. Then placed both her hands on Dick Thornton's two arms.

"Dick," she said in an awed tone, "didn't you use *both* your arms just now, when you kept me from falling?"

Her companion nodded.

"I have been meaning to tell you, Barbara, but you have been too busy with other things. My arm has been growing stronger each day, but I didn't know myself until this minute that I could use the lame one as easily as the good. I suppose because I was frightened about you, I forgot my own weakness."

Then while Barbara was gazing at her friend in silence, but with her eyes expressing her joy in his news, Mildred Thornton came running along the path toward them.

"Dr. Mason says Eugenia is much better this afternoon. He has the greatest hopes of her," she cried, while still several yards away.

"Gene recognized Nona and asked for something to eat. Nona says she even objected to the way in which she gave her medicine, so I suppose we have

the old Gene back again. Come with me, Barbara dear, Dr. Mason says we may both speak to her. Afterwards she is to be left alone to go to sleep and I shall have to try to keep the children quiet. You must see if you can get Jan away from her door. The boy has not moved from there since six o'clock this morning."

Then Mildred condescended to recognize her brother. But after kissing him hurriedly, she put her arm about Barbara's waist and both girls fled back to the house.

Later, Dick returned to town without seeing either one of them again that afternoon.

CHAPTER XIX
En Route

Barbara Meade was chosen as the suitable one of the three girls to accompany Eugenia out of Belgium.

There were a number of reasons for this decision, but the most important was that her friends agreed she was most in need of a change. Another point was that Eugenia appeared to prefer to have her.

But the journey could not be expected to be an altogether pleasant one. Eugenia was still ill enough to be a responsibility, and, moreover, the German authorities did not hesitate to express their wish to be rid of her as soon as possible. It was for this reason that the trip was planned as soon as it was in the least feasible.

Toward the middle of December the preparations for departure were finally concluded. It was arranged that Nona Davis and Mildred Thornton should remain in charge of Eugenia's house in the woods for a time. For the children must continue being cared for. Therefore, the American hospital in Brussels had agreed temporarily to dispense with their services. Later on perhaps it might be possible to make a more definite arrangement. But at present Nona and Mildred were both pleased to have a change in their work. Besides, this change afforded them the chance to stay on with their friends until the actual time of their leave-taking.

Neither of the four girls ever forgot the final moment of farewell.

Since daylight they had talked about everything else under the sun except the fact that they might not meet again for many months. For under the circumstances naturally their future plans were indefinite.

Barbara and Eugenia had been informed that they would be escorted to the frontiers of Holland. Once within the neutral state no further observation would be made of them and they could go where they chose.

They had determined to cross at once to England and then, lingering only long enough for Eugenia to rest, to travel by slow stages to southern France. Once there, they were once more to take refuge in the little "Farmhouse with the Blue Front Door."

For in the midst of Eugenia's illness a letter had arrived from Madame Castaigne. In it she had demanded that Miss Peabody be removed at once from a country at present overrun by barbarians. In her opinion, the American Red Cross girls should never have departed from the protection of her beloved France. Whenever it was possible the farmhouse was at their disposal. Moreover, Madame Castaigne suffered for their companionship. For she and François had been entirely alone for months. Captain Castaigne was away in another part of the country with his regiment.

So it had been both Eugenia's and Barbara's fancy to go back for a time to the little house they had both loved. When Eugenia had entirely recovered her health, they could then decide on the next step.

At Eugenia's request no one of their many friends in Brussels came out to say good-bye on the last day. For her own sake and the happiness of the children she wished her departure to be as quiet as possible.

She and Barbara were therefore ready and waiting by noon, when the German officer arrived who was to take them to the border line.

Neither of the girls had been informed who this man might be, nor what his character and rank.

Personally, Barbara felt a considerable anxiety. So much of the comfort of the first of their journey would depend on his courtesy. Then there was the chance that Eugenia might be less strong than they hoped and fall ill again along the way.

Yet Eugenia herself seemed to have no qualms upon the subject. Her one desire appeared to be to get away, to return to the country she had wilfully turned her back upon. For it had been chiefly due to Eugenia's influence that the American Red Cross girls had left France to begin a new service in Belgium.

Finally, when the German officer arrived, Nona, Mildred and Barbara were equally discouraged by his manner and appearance.

In the first place, he was a man of a rough and surly exterior. He was only a sergeant, with an overbearing and insolent method of speaking. Indeed, he made no pretence of treating Eugenia in any way except as an intruder who had come dangerously near being a traitor to his government. Therefore, he had nothing but scorn and dislike of her.

He would have chosen to travel with his prisoner in handcuffs, but since this had been forbidden she should be allowed no other consideration.

So Nona and Mildred had to kiss their friends good-bye with the German sergeant staring at them disdainfully. Then before they realized what was taking place they beheld Eugenia and Barbara being marched down the path toward a car which was to take them to their train.

Eugenia could scarcely keep up with the rapid pace demanded of her. She looked very ill and fragile and Barbara very tiny to have her clinging for support to her arm.

Neither Mildred nor Nona could see distinctly at the last. Afterwards they remembered that Eugenia and Bab had both waved their hands just as the motor car plunged ahead down the narrow path through the woods.

They had promised to write as soon as it was possible to get a letter through the lines. But there was a chance that their mail must first be sent to the United States and then have to recross the ocean.

Naturally the two girls who had been left behind were deeply depressed. Yet they had little time for reflection. For Eugenia had asked that the children be given a feast as soon as she was safely out of the way. Moreover, there was Nicolete dissolved in tears! She had wished to accompany her friend, but on account of Monsieur Bebé's helplessness had been persuaded to remain behind.

Work is ever the solace of sorrow, as Mildred and Nona both discovered ten minutes after their parting from the other two Red Cross girls.

But Eugenia and Barbara had no such immediate consolation.

Half a dozen times in the next few hours Barbara greatly desired to start a war on her own account. Yet in spite of her somewhat fiery temperament she could say and do nothing. It was not on her own account that she was so angry, but for the sake of her friend.

For notwithstanding her apparent weakness, Eugenia was forced to travel in a train so crowded that she started upon her journey standing up. Barbara's protest against this as an impossibility availed nothing. But a few moments later a Belgian woman took compassion upon them. She was old but sturdy and determined and Eugenia's refusal to occupy her place she would not consider. Moreover, the girl had by this time reached such a condition that she must either sit down or fall. Though desiring her to be as wretched as possible, even her guard appreciated this fact.

Afterwards Barbara decided that she had never gone through more trying hours than those she endured on their way into Holland.

Eugenia scarcely spoke a dozen words. Indeed, she appeared happily unconscious of a great deal of the insolence leveled at her. But Barbara missed nothing. The sergeant's every glance at Eugenia was an insult, whenever he spoke to her it was with a growl. Perhaps his task of driving an American girl out of a once friendly country was such a disagreeable one that no one except a bear would have wished to undertake it.

However, both Barbara and Eugenia were willing exiles. The moment when the girls realized that their feet were upon Dutch soil was the happiest they had spent in many weeks. For here at last their guard said good-bye to them. At least, though he used no words, his behavior had the effect of a good-bye. What he actually did was to deposit them upon the platform of a railroad station, then with a grunt of disfavor turn and stride away. But the girls both knew that the next train on which they were to travel would run through the peaceful Dutch country.

By night they arrived at a Dutch port. In spite of the peril of floating mines and submarines the Holland passenger boats were still making their nightly journeys to the English coast.

Naturally there were but few passengers aboard, as no one was crossing for pleasure. But tonight there were a small number of business men and a few

women.

At eight o'clock in the evening their boat sailed, and immediately after Barbara and Eugenia went to bed. Food was brought to their stateroom, but they were too weary and too excited to eat, so it was scarcely nine o'clock when they were both sound asleep.

Of course they appreciated the possible danger of their crossing. But as a matter of fact neither Barbara nor Eugenia gave the idea five minutes' thought. When one has lived in the midst of war's tragedies and terrors, one no longer worries over *possible* misfortunes. There is time enough when the blow falls.

Therefore, at midnight the two friends were peacefully sleeping, when they were awakened by an extraordinary sensation and then a tumultuous noise.

Suddenly their little steamer had come to an abrupt halt in mid-sea. There was no warning, no gradual slowing down. One moment they had been traveling at full speed, the next they were at a complete standstill. Then there began a tremendous rushing about on the deck above the floor where the two American Red Cross girls had their berths. Soon after a heavy splash followed as if something had been dropped into the sea.

Although they were both awakened with the first reversal of the boat's engines, neither of the girls spoke until after the noise subsided.

Then it was Eugenia.

"Something extraordinary has happened, Bab dear," she said quietly. "I think you had best go and see what it is. I have a feeling that perhaps our boat is going to sink. But there has been no explosion so far!"

Eugenia was extraordinarily calm, almost passive. One may not believe this state of mind to be possible, but wait until you have had just such a personal experience with danger.

Barbara's answer was to scramble quickly out of the upper berth. She chanced to be wearing a warm blue wrapper which served as a gown. So now she only needed to slip her fur coat over it and pull down her gray squirrel cap over her brown curls.

"Be getting dressed, Eugenia, while I find out what has happened. I'll come back in a moment," she advised.

But once outside her stateroom, Barbara discovered only a mild excitement. A few passengers were running up and down the narrow hallway, clinging to scanty costumes. One of them explained the situation to Barbara.

"Nothing's much amiss, we are all getting too nervous these days," he commented. "Our ship has just run up against a solid bank of fog. As we can't see an inch ahead of us, our captain has too good sense to go on in the darkness. We may have to stay here an hour, or twenty-four, there is no telling. Hope a submarine won't come along and pick us off." And with this parting pleasantry Barbara's new acquaintance departed.

The next instant Barbara returned and opened her stateroom door.

"Go back to sleep, Gene dear, everything is serene," she said reassuringly; "there is only a heavy fog at sea. I want to go up on deck and investigate, so please don't worry about me."

A few moments later Barbara was groping her way about on deck until she discovered an empty steamer chair. This she crawled into, tucking her feet up under her and snuggling down close in the darkness. She could still hear the sailors rushing about on deck. Now and then she could even catch the dim outline of a figure, but nothing else was discernible. The very lights suspended from the ship's side were pale and flickering.

Yet it was all immensely interesting. Outside the ship both sky and water had apparently ceased to exist. One could see only a solid mass of gray-black fog like a wet and heavy veil overspreading the world.

Barbara had recovered from her fatigue with her few hours of sleep. Never had she felt more wide awake or more excited. If only it were possible to see more.

Suddenly she jumped up from her chair. It is true the decks were wet and slippery and since she could not see her way about, nor be seen, she might be in danger of falling. Nevertheless, Barbara decided to risk the danger. A tumble more or less need not be serious and she was freezing from sitting

still. And yet she had not the faintest intention or desire of going back to her stateroom.

The fog might last for many hours, but then there was the chance that it might lift at any moment. Barbara greatly desired to see the spectacle of a familiar world emerging from darkness into light.

Fortunately her side of the deck appeared to be entirely deserted.

She rose and walked a few steps up and down, compelled to go slowly, for the fog lay like a damp weight upon her chest, pressing her backward with its dim, invisible hands.

But after a little time, growing bolder when the desire to gaze down into the water swept over her, she turned and walked blindly forward. Within a few paces she reached out to grasp the ship's rails.

But instead her hands touched something warm and human. Immediately she gave a smothered cry of embarrassment and fright.

"I am so sorry," she murmured apologetically, then with a characteristic laugh. "But really I don't know whether I have run into you or you into me. Will you please move to the right and I'll go to the left. Then we need never meet again."

"Barbara," began a familiar voice.

For the second time the girl's hands stretched forward, but this time they clung to the coat of the young fellow standing within a few feet of her.

"Dick Thornton, can it be possible this is you, when you are in Brussels?" she protested. "But then how can it be any one except you, although I have not seen you. If it is only your ghost I am holding on to, at least it is a very substantial one, and I never was so glad to meet any other ghost in my life."

In answer Dick Thornton laughed out loud. "Did anyone in the world ever talk in such a ridiculous fashion as Barbara, and yet was there ever anyone so delightful?" He slipped his arm through the girl's.

"Let us walk up and down for a few moments while I explain the reality of my presence," he suggested, quietly taking his companion's consent for

granted.

"Personally, I think it would be the more surprising if I were not here. Did you think for an instant I would allow you and Eugenia to go on this long trip alone, when Eugenia has been so ill? I did not mention the subject to you girls, since I did not intend to have a discussion. But whether you allow it or not I shall be your faithful follower until you reach the little French farmhouse."

Barbara's eyes were swimming with unexpected tears.

"You are the kindest person in the world always, Dick," she answered. "And I can't tell you how glad I am to have you with us! I did dread the responsibility of Gene more than I would confess. Besides, I want you to see our 'House with the Blue Front Door.' But I wonder if it is fair to Mildred and Nona to have you leave them for even a short time? Your place is with them rather than any one else, isn't it?"

"My place is beside you, Barbara, whenever you are willing to have me," Dick returned in such a matter-of-fact fashion that his companion did not at once understand the meaning of his words.

"Your place beside me?" she repeated slowly. "Why, how is that possible when Mildred is your sister and Nona——"

But Dick was drawing her toward the side of the ship and now they were both leaning against the railing looking down at the glossy darkness beneath them.

"Yes, Mildred is my sister and Nona my friend," Dick continued, "yet neither one of them can mean to me what the girl I would choose above all others to be my wife means. Don't answer me for a moment, Barbara. I have no delusion about your feeling for me, but that makes no difference. I want you to know that ever since those first days in New York you have filled the greater portion of my world. No matter what may happen to divide us, nor how far your life may lead away from mine, I shall not change."

The girl and man were standing within only a few feet of each other. Now Barbara moved closer and laid her hand on her companion's coat sleeve.

"I am not very anxious for anything to divide us, nor for my life to lead far away from yours," she whispered.

At this moment the bank of fog rolled up as if it were a stage curtain being raised in answer to the prompter's bell, when for the first time that evening Dick and Barbara caught the vision of each other's faces.

CHAPTER XX
Noel

It was Christmas morning in southern France. For several hours a light snow had been falling, but had not stayed upon the ground. Yet it clothed the branches of the trees with white lace and filled the air with jewels.

Walking alone a slender girl with dark hair and eyes lifted her face to let the snow melt upon her cheeks. She looked fragile, as if she were just recovering from an illness, nor did her expression betray any special interest in Christmas.

"These woods are as lovely as I remember them," she said aloud. "It is true, I never could find a place in Belgium I liked half so well."

Then she stopped a moment and glanced around her.

"I do hope Barbara and Dick won't discover I have run away. I feel as much a truant as if I were a small girl. But they surely won't be tramping through my woods at present, when they assured me they would spend several hours at the chateau. So I can't be found out till it is too late. I feel I must see Nicolete's little log house and Nona's 'Pool of Melisande.'"

Ten minutes after Eugenia arrived at the desired place. The lake of clear water which she had once described as the "pool of truth" was today covered with a thin coating of ice at its edges. The center was as untroubled as it had always been. Above it tall evergreen trees leaned so close to one another that their summits almost touched.

Eugenia breathed deeply of the fragrance of the snow and the pine. The day was an unusually cold one for this part of the country, but the winter was being everywhere severe. It was as if nature would make no easier the task of her children's destruction of each other.

But Eugenia was not thinking of warlike things at this hour. She was merely feeling a physical pleasure in her own returning strength.

Yet just as she was congratulating herself on having been able to walk so far without tiring, the girl experienced a sudden, overpowering sensation of fatigue.

For several moments she stood upright fighting her weakness; she even turned and started back toward home. Then recognizing her own folly, Eugenia looked for a place to rest.

But she did not look very far nor in but one direction. Yes, the log was there in the same place it had been six months before.

With a half smile at herself Eugenia sat down. She was not deceived, for she understood perfectly why she had wished to come back to this neighborhood and why today she had wanted to walk alone into these woods.

But there could be no wrong in what she was doing, since no one would ever guess her reason.

Eugenia was sincerely pleased over Barbara's and Dick's happiness. But she would never confess herself so completely surprised as Barbara demanded that she be. She merely announced that if one of the girls felt compelled to marry (and she supposed they could not all hope to escape the temptation of their nursing experiences in Europe), at least she was grateful that Barbara had chosen to bestow her affection upon an American. Personally, she felt convinced that no foreign marriage could be a success.

Yet here sat Eugenia in an extremely sentimental attitude with the light snow falling about her. More than this, she was in an equally sentimental state of mind. But then nothing of this kind matters when one chances to be entirely alone. Dreams are one's own possession.

Then the girl heard a sound that entirely accorded with her train of thought.

It was a slow velvet-like tread moving in her direction.

In another moment Duke had approached and laid his great head in her lap. He did not move again; there was no foolish wagging of his tail. These expressions of emotion were meant for lesser beasts; Duke revealed his joy and his affection in a beautiful, almost a thrilling silence.

Eugenia had not seen her old friend since her arrival at the farmhouse a few days before. For some reason he had not called there with François and she had not been outside the house until today. Their trip had been a long and tiring one and she was more exhausted than she had expected to be.

But this was a far more satisfactory reunion and Eugenia was sincerely moved.

She put her own thin cheek down on Duke's silver head and remained as still as he was. Truly *he* had not forgotten!

Captain Castaigne found them like this when he appeared within the next few seconds.

He made no pretence of a greeting. Instead he frowned upon his one-time friend as severely as she might have upon him had their positions been reversed.

"It is not possible that you are in the woods in this snowstorm, Eugenie! Miss Meade told me that I should find you at the little farmhouse. Take my arm and we will return as quickly as possible."

With entire meekness Eugenia did as she was told. She did not even remember to be amused at this young Frenchman's amazing fashion of ordering her about. But she was surprised into speechlessness at his unexpected appearance.

"Only yesterday your mother assured us you were in northern France with your regiment," Eugenia murmured as she was being escorted along the path toward home. "She insisted that there was no possible prospect of your returning to this neighborhood in many months."

Captain Castaigne smiled. "Is that American frankness, Eugenie? We French people prefer to leave certain things to the imagination. Of course, I understand that you would never have come to the farmhouse had you dreamed of my being nearby. However, I am here for the purpose of seeing you. My mother did not intend to deceive you; I had not told her of my intention. But we will not talk of these things until we arrive at home. You are too weary to speak."

This was so manifestly true that Eugenia made no attempt at argument.

She was fatigued, and yet there was something else keeping her silent.

How splendidly well Captain Castaigne looked! His face was less boyish than she remembered it. But then she had not understood him at the beginning of their acquaintance. It had been stupid of her too, because no soldier receives the Cross of the Legion of Honor who has not put aside boyish things.

Because it was Christmas day, Noel as the French term it, the living room at the farmhouse was gay with evergreens. But better than this, a real fire burned in the fireplace.

Eugenia let her companion take off her long nursing cloak and she herself removed her cap.

Then she stood revealed a different Eugenia, because of Barbara's taste and determination.

Instead of her uniform or her usual shabby, ill-made dress, she wore an exquisite pale gray crepe de chine, which made a beauty of her slenderness. About her throat there were folds of white and in her belt a dull, rose-velvet rose. This costume had been purchased in Paris as the girls passed through and Eugenia wore it today in honor of Christmas.

Without a doubt Eugenia looked pale and ill, but her hair was twisted about her head like a dull brown coronet and the shadows about her eyes revealed their new depth and sweetness.

When she sat down again, drawing near the fire with a little shiver, Captain Castaigne came and knelt beside her.

No American could have done this without awkwardness and self-consciousness. Yet there was no hint of either in the young French officer's attitude. Seeing him, Eugenia forgot her past narrowness and the critical misunderstanding of a nature that cannot appreciate temperaments and circumstances unlike their own. She was reminded of the picture of a young French knight, the St. Louis of France, whom she had seen among the frescoes of the Pantheon in Paris.

Very gravely Captain Castaigne raised Eugenia's hand to his lips.

"I care for you more than I did when I told you of my love and you would not believe. I shall go on caring. How long must I serve before you return my affection?"

Eugenia shook her head fretfully like a child.

"But it isn't a question of my caring. I told you that there were a thousand other things that stood between us, Henri."

Then she drew her hand away and laid it lightly upon the young man's head.

"This house has many memories for me. Perhaps when I am an old woman you will let me come back here and live a part of each year. May I buy the house from your mother? Ask her as a favor to me?"

Eugenia was trying her best to return to her old half maternal treatment of the young officer. This had been the attitude which she had used in the months of his illness in the little "Farmhouse with the Blue Front Door."

But this time their positions were reversed.

"We will talk of that another time," he returned. "Now you must be fair with me. I will not accept such an answer as you gave me before. I must be told the truth."

Captain Castaigne had gotten up and stood looking down upon Eugenia.

"I return to my regiment tomorrow. You must tell me today."

In reply the girl let her hands fall gently into her lap and gazed directly into the handsome, clear-cut face above her own.

"Why should I try to deceive you? It would be only sheer pretence. You are the only man I have ever cared for or ever shall. But I'll never marry you under any possible circumstances. I am too old and too unattractive and too —oh, a hundred other things."

But Captain Castaigne was smiling in entire serenity.

"We will marry at the little 'Farmhouse with the Blue Front Door' during my next leave of absence."

But Barbara and Dick were at this moment entering the blue front door.

Half an hour later, when they had finished Christmas dinner, Dick Thornton drew a magazine from his pocket, which had on its cover the sign of the Red Cross.

"Here is a poem some one in America has written called 'She of the Red Cross.' Will you listen while I read it to you? To me the poem, of course, means Barbara and to Captain Castaigne, Eugenia."

"She fulfills the dramatic destiny of woman,
Because she stands valiant, in the presence of pestilence,
And faces woe unafraid,
And binds up the wounds made by the wars of men.
She fights to defeat pain,
And to conquer torture,
And to cheat death of his untimely prey.
And her combat is for neither glory nor gain, but, with charity and mercy and compassion as her weapons, she storms incessantly the ramparts of grief.
There thrills through her life never the sharp, sudden thunder of the charge, never the swift and ardent rush of the short, decisive conflict—the tumult of applauding nations does not reach her ears—and the courage that holds her heart high comes from the voice of her invincible soul.
She fulfills the dramatic destiny of woman because, reared to await the homage of man and to receive his service, she becomes when the war trumps sound, the servitor of the world.
And because whenever men have gone into battle, women have borne the real burden of the fray,
And because since the beginning of time, man when he is hurt or maimed turns to her and finds, in her tenderness, the consolation and comfort which she alone can give.
Thus she of the Red Cross stands today, as woman has stood always, the most courageous and the most merciful figure in all history.
She is the Valor of the World."

* * * * * *

The fourth volume in the American Red Cross Girls series will be called "The Red Cross Girls with the Russian Army."

In this volume the four girls will return to the scene of actual fighting. They will be with the Russian army in their retreat. Moreover, certain characters introduced in the first book will reappear in the fourth, so increasing the

excitement and interest of the plot. A new romance differing from the others plays an unexpected part in the life of one of the girls. The story may safely promise to have more important developments than any of the past volumes.

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